Volume IV.
Number 13.

Week of
August 30, 1943

New York

THEATRE CRITICS'

Reviews

1943

INDEX

Stage Play	Pages	Stage Play	Pages
Apology	351, 352, 353	†*Murder Without Crime	293, 294, 295
Ask My Friend Sandy	378, 379, 380	Nine Girls	393, 394, 395
Barber Had Two Sons (The)	383, 384, 385	*Oklahoma	341, 342, 343
Boy Meets Girl	316, 317	Patriots (The)	385, 386, 387, 388
†Chauve Souris 1943	298, 299, 300	Richard III	348, 349, 350
Counterattack	380, 381, 382	†Run Little Chillun	296, 297, 298
Dark Eyes	390, 391, 392	*Something for the Boys	398, 399, 400
*Early to Bed	314, 315, 316	Sons and Soldiers	325, 326, 327
Family (The)	344, 345, 346	*Student Prince (The)	320, 321, 322
First Million (The)	330, 331, 332	This Rock	369, 370, 371
For Your Pleasure	374, 375, 376	*Those Endearing Young Charms	318, 319, 320
*Harriet	364, 365, 366	*Three's a Family	328, 329, 330
*Kiss and Tell	356, 357, 358	*Tomorrow the World	334, 335, 336
Men in Shadow	360, 361, 362	†Try and Get It	306, 307, 308
†*Merry Widow (The)	301, 302, 303	†*Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304, 305, 306
Milky Way (The)	317	*Vagabond King (The)	311, 312, 313
Moon Vine (The)	372, 373, 374	*Ziegfeld Follies	338, 339, 340

PRODUCTIONS CONTINUING

Reviews appeared in the 1942 CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

Stage Play	Pages	Stage Play	Pages
*Doughgirls (The)	124, 125, 126	*Rosalinda	187, 188, 189
*Janie	244, 245, 246	*Skin of Our Teeth (The)	173, 174, 175, 176
		*Star and Garter	262, 263, 264

Reviews appeared in the 1941 CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

*Angel Street	182, 183, 184, 185	*Life With Father	489, 490, 491
*Arsenic and Old Lace	417, 418, 419, 420		

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of August 30, 1943.*
†"Try and Get It" opened Monday, August 2nd, at the Cort Theatre.
†"The Two Mrs. Carrolls" opened Tuesday, August 3rd, at the Booth Theatre.
†"The Merry Widow" opened Wednesday, August 4th, at the Majestic Theatre.
†"Chauve Souris" opened Thursday, August 12th, at the Royale Theatre.
†"Run Little Chillun" opened Friday, August 13th, at the Hudson Theatre.
†"Murder Without Crime" opened Wednesday, August 18th, at the Cort Theatre.

THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELGERAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

Published by

CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS 235 East 22nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Yearly Subscription
$15.00

"Murder Without Crime"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 19 1943

Murder With Frills

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY, JR.

THE CORT THEATER has been transformed into a sort of de luxe Grand Guignol by the debut last night of "Murder Without Crime," a thriller by J. Lee Thompson, which comes to Broadway after having had a London production. It is a bizarre, twisting little tale which wanders through the devious corridors of the human mind, coming upon everything from whimsy to sadism. It is more of a psychological drama than a whodunit, and its subtleties are distinctly reminiscent of the offerings of the Paris horror theater. The thin threads of its fabric are not woven for examination under the light of reason, but it is, nevertheless, fashioned for an intriguing evening in the theater.

• • •

The play starts off in true Grand Guignol fashion with a love scene which leaves very little to the imagination and which is inspired by Scotch, champagne and dope. There is, of course, a murder which follows this, and then there is the introduction of the leading character, played by Henry Daniell. It is through his person that the play's many facets are presented. In a sense he is the villain of the piece, but he also provides most of the comedy relief. He is at one moment quizzically old maidish about his suspicions, and at the next turn of the plot he is brutal and vicious. Most of the subtlety and suspense stem from this character, and it sets the standard for success or failure. Fortunately for last night's audience, Mr. Daniell played it with imagination and finesse and turned the trick admirably.

• • •

The other three members of this four-character cast concern themselves chiefly with sustaining the moods set by their eccentric colleague. Bretaigne Windust, who also staged and helped produce the thriller, is Mr. Daniell's chief foil. It was necessary for him to take over the part at the last minute, and although he has not appeared on the stage for several years he makes a convincing mark as the frightened murderer who is trying to conceal his peccadillo. Mr. Windust has also managed to add movement and chills to a script that is largely repartee. Viola Keats and Frances Tannehill appear, respectively, as an errant but contrite wife and an Other Woman.

• • •

"Murder Without Crime" is a soapbubble of a murder mystery, and all things have combined to keep it delicately in the air. It is frank make-believe rather than realism. Like most plays of its kind, it has its moments of terror, which are garnished with blood and violence. But it is more piquant than stark. It replaces the usual brutality and social significance with many moments of dry humor. It succeeds in keeping its watchers both interested and guessing, but without gunplay, Oriental potions or masked murderers. It is a light thriller but an effective one, and its watchword is: bad cess to any one who reveals its plot to those who have not already seen it.

'MURDER WITHOUT CRIME'

Play in three acts by J. Lee Thompson; staged by Bretaigne Windust; setting by Raymond Sovey; presented at the Cort Theater Wednesday, August 18, 1943, by Del Bondio, Windust & Weatherly. The cast:

Stephen ..... Bretaigne Windust
Grena ..... Frances Tannehill
Matthew ..... Henry Daniell
Jan ..... Viola Keats

NEW YORK POST
August 19, 1943

"Murder Without Crime" a New London Thriller at the Cort

By WILELLA WALDORF

ADMIRERS of the urbane, sophisticated, somewhat languid style of Mayfair murder melodrama so prevalent in London's West End before the war will enjoy "Murder Without Crime," an import of recent vintage but pre-war setting presented last night at the Cort. There are only four characters in it and one of these—a blonde night club entertainer who is careless enough to get herself stabbed in the flat of a young gentleman about town—is disposed of early in the evening when the young gentleman hides her body in a hideous antique ottoman that stands before the fireplace, ready for just such an emergency.

The young man, whose wife had left him some time before, was planning to rush off to Devonshire with the night club chanteuse when the phone rang and the wife announced that she was about to return. In the scene that followed, the blonde seized a dagger prominently displayed on the wall to give jealous mistresses ideas and there ensued, as the detective novels say, a struggle.

Since Bretaigne Windust has directed the play with considerable attention to realistic detail, there was also some very red blood in evidence, notably on the young man's pocket handkerchief, and when he hastily burned it in the fireplace, real smoke issued forth as it smoldered among the coals.

As if this weren't enough to indicate that "Murder Without Crime" is a very slick production, the telephone actually worked. You could hear people talking on the other end, and when one of the characters dialed a number, you could hear that too.

Henry Daniell and Realistic Scotch

Even the scotch looked like scotch instead of very weak tea. It was undoubtedly tea, however, for if it had been the real thing, we greatly fear Henry Daniell would have been roaring drunk before the final curtain, while as a matter of fact, he stayed sober enough to give a beautifully modulated and skillfully timed performance from start to finish, winding up with a very effective impression of how it feels to know that you've inadvertently taken poison designed for somebody else.

All this may sound a little complicated, but after all, it is hardly fair to set down the plot of a thriller that depends for much of its kick on the fact that the audience doesn't know what's going to happen next.

Fool-proof crime addicts who know all the dodges will probably not be profoundly surprised at the denouement of this latest London number, but the author manages an ironic finish that is perfectly satisfactory, even if you are able to guess the main idea before they get around to opening the ottoman.

A Reminder of Patrick Hamilton's "Rope"

J. Lee Thompson is an author unfamiliar to this reporter, but we shouldn't be surprised if he once saw, and admired, Patrick Hamilton's "Rope," produced on Broadway as "Rope's End."

In "Rope," two young "thrill killers" murdered a fellow undergraduate at Oxford and hid his body in a chest. But an eccentric, somewhat perverted intellectual, an older man interested in watching other people squirm, relentlessly tracked down their crime.

In "Murder Without Crime," there is no thrill killing, but an accident, which a frantic young man tries to cover up by hiding the body in an ottoman. Whereupon the urbane and amusing, but sadistic, gentleman from downstairs proceeds to play with the young man as a cat plays with a mouse, letting him go for a few feet only to pounce again when he thinks he has finally got away.

"Murder Without Crime" is no "Rope" and it probably was never intended to be, but it is fairly well contrived as thrillers go these days, and the role of the sadist from downstairs is a very entertaining one, especially as played by Henry Daniell for everything there is in it, and frequently, a little more than that.

Mr. Daniell is not the terrifying figure Ernest Milton was in "Rope," but he is a delightful fellow to watch for an evening, roaming around in his plum-colored plush smoking jacket. When he is on the stage, which is fortunately often, "Murder Without Crime" is genuinely diverting.

Windust As Director and Actor

As the young man who plays mouse to Daniell's cat, Mr. Windust gave a sound performance somewhat marred by the fact that he was obviously under a severe vocal strain. Stage director of the play, he stepped into the part late last week when the actor originally engaged for it left the cast. His direction, as usual, is expert.

Viola Keats as the wife and Frances Tannehill as she-who-gets-stabbed perform capably what they have to do, which isn't much beyond looking well and sounding British.

When she was called upon to wax a trifle roguish, Miss Keats seemed to be using that wrinkled-up-nose technique combined with a throaty gurgle that is, and long has been, Gertrude Lawrence's trade-mark. This business of Miss Lawrence's has always induced in us a mild nausea, and we would like Miss Keats a lot better if she could contrive somehow to ditch it in the ottoman along with Miss Tannehill's body.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 19, 1943

All Talk and No Action Makes 'Murder' a Dull Play

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE MURDER play that Broadway could use right now has definitely not turned up in *Murder Without Crime*. This languid work might equally well have been called *Murder Without Excitement* for it raises no goose pimples and almost no suspense. Mr. Thompson has not, to be sure, aimed at anything so vulgar as a real thrill; he seems to have tried, rather, for the suave and brittle tone of drawing-room comedy at its most decadent. He has achieved that tone at times but at the expense of almost everything else.

Mr. Thompson is concerned with a young Londoner who accidentally stabs his mistress with a dagger she is brandishing. In a panic of fright, he hides her body in an ottoman just as his landlord comes to call. The landlord, scarcely a loveable character, observes his tenant's jitters and begins to smell a rat. The rest of the proceedings consist largely in the landlord's sadistic playing of cat-and-mouse with his victim. He is fairly good at wearing him down, but incomparably better at wearing down the audience. For much as the landlord loves to torture, he loves even more to talk. He talks the play, which at best was breaking no speed laws, to a standstill.

• • •

Moving so slowly, *Murder Without Crime* not only becomes dull, but gives you ample time to figure out everything that is coming, right down to the final twist—a pat piece of irony that fits in with Mr. Thompson's general love of sophistication. The milk-train progress of the play also gives you ample time to examine its various motivations and reject them. The whole thing is about as sensible as it's exciting.

• • •

The cast of four, speedily reduced to a cast of three, bears a pretty heavy burden. As the landlord, Henry Daniell plays in a smooth, silky fashion, but the part outwears its welcome. As the murderer, Bretaigne Windust was handicapped by a terribly forced voice, against which he struggled gamely but not too happily. Frances Tannehill as the mistress, and Viola Keats as a wife, played along. It was not a very memorable evening.

"Murder Without Crime"

NEW YORK TIMES
August 19, 1943

'Murder Without Crime,' Also Without Passion, Opens a Broadway Engagement at the Cort

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ALTHOUGH additional proof had not been needed that London and Broadway do not see eye to eye on the matter of plays, the Messrs. Del Bondio, Windust and Weatherly supplied a bit more last evening at the Cort. For J. Lee Thompson's "Murder Without Crime," which they, as a triumvirate, produced, had a brisk run in England and was highly regarded as a psychological melodrama; transplanted to Times Square, it seemed soft as a thriller and talky as a play. Broadway requires more blood, or at least the thunder that precedes blood, than "Murder Without Crime" was prepared to give.

• • •

No secret lies hidden from the audience at the start of the play. A man is seeking to remove from himself his mistress because his estranged wife is coming back to him; in the removal there is a quarrel over a dagger and she falls to the floor. The rest of the evening concerns itself with the man's attempts to cover up, and it is to be feared that most of the incidents, in addition to the climax, do not continue long as secrets either. For "Murder Without Crime" bows to the cardinal sin of letting an audience guess the answer before the playwright craftily can get it out for a final curtain.

Mr. Thompson has been betrayed into several kinds of writing, not smoothly coordinated. Part of the time the characters speak as though they had been listening long to Noel Coward, which is good talk when Mr. Coward does it, but not so bright when he does not. At others the author gives in to the easiest way: The man offers his lady a check and, drawing herself to her full height, she snarls, "You swine!" On the credit side, however, Mr. Thompson has drawn one good character, which manages to come pretty much alive to make more regrettable the fact the play itself is not more lively.

• • •

Henry Daniell plays this role, that of the landlord and friend of the man with the conscience and the body requiring disposal. Mr. Daniell is soft-spoken and sinister; in a good horror play he unquestionably would be a psychological Karloff. Bretaigne Windust, who directed, took over the other leading role only a few days ago, and in addition last evening was troubled with a cold which bothered him. However, Mr. Windust, the director, seemed to allow Mr. Windust, the actor, certain liberties which did not add to the smoothness of the playing. Viola Keats has the role of the returning wife and Frances Tannehill that of the discarded mistress.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 19, 1943

'Murder Without Crime' a Simple Thriller About a Mental Sadist

By JOHN CHAPMAN

AS HENRY DANIELL says, "Everybody loves a good, juicy murder." Mr. Daniell is a tall Englishman with a long, lugubrious face who has a long, lugubrious role in "Murder Without Crime"; and when he makes the remark his face shows just the right amount of relish.

The crime in the play which opened last night at the Cort Theatre may or may not be murder and may or may not be a crime, but what results from it is a very pleasantly tense psychological melodrama, English style. I love to curl up with a good quiet audience at a psychological melodrama, English style.

It wouldn't be right to go blabbing too much about the plot, because there isn't a whole lot of it. Part of the fun of attending a show like this—which has one set and four characters (one fewer than the superb "Angel Street")—is to see how much a playwright can make out of very little more than an air of suspense and a small cast.

Nosy Mr. Daniell

J. Lee Thompson, who wrote "Murder Without Crime" some years ago for production in London, has used his materials well. They are these, as to people:

The tenant of a flat, a slightly shifty fellow.

The tenant's mistress, a nice blonde dish.

The tenant's wife, who comes home for a reconciliation after having left her husband.

The landlord, who lives downstairs and who, like all landlords, is quite nosy.

After a certain amount of drinking champagne and doing some bold lovemaking, the man and his mistress quarrel over the imminent return of the wife, and the mistress gets taken stabbed. Then she is dumped beneath the seat of a big ottoman before the fireplace.

It's a juicy stabbing, and the lover barely has wiped up the blood when in comes the landlord looking for a book.

Mr. Daniell is the landlord, and he's a cross between Clifton Webb and Baby Snooks. He is precise, literate, self-centered and eerily curious. He doesn't say, "Why, Daddy?"—but he keeps asking questions for most of the rest of the play that drive the poor lover frantic.

They are odd questions, for they always skirt the subject of a possible crime and never probe directly into it. Mr. Daniell might have suspected foul play right along—or he mayn't have had the faintest notion of anything being amiss.

Having Wonderful Time

I can tell you this much: Mr. Daniell is having the time of his life, for he is a sadist who loves to see people being mentally tortured. He frequents the outside of prisons when hangings are scheduled, so he can imagine what's going on in the minds of the condemned. It is a good stage portrait.

The management—Del Bondio, Windust and Weatherly—was mentally tortured itself last night before the curtain went up, for Bretaigne Windust, who not only directed the play but was also to play the un-gay philanderer, had laryngitis. I don't think his strained voice hurt him a bit; it may, in fact, have helped. I want to go back and hear him when his voice is better, and maybe I shall have to advise him to go out and catch some more laryngitis. He was, last night, a convincingly tortured young man.

Frances Tannehill, who is highly attractive, keeps the early minutes of the play lively until she gets the shiv in her gizzard. Viola Keats then takes over for a while, so that Windust and Daniell won't have to be talking ALL the time. The "switch" ending was satisfactory to this customer.

The set—of a Mayfair apartment—is by Raymond Sovey.

NEW YORK SUN
August 19, 1943

The Cort Tries Again With 'Murder Without Crime,' Lacking in Suspense

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE CORT THEATER, making its second start in a season only two and a half weeks old, now gives us "Murder Without Crime," brought to these shores from London's chill and shudder factory. The new piece proves a talky, rambling, and only occasionally effective melodrama, done with four characters but played almost entirely by two of them.

"Murder Without Crime," written by J. Lee Thompson, represents the first production of a new managerial combination—Del Bondio, Windust and Weatherly, each of whom is considered wise in the ways of the theater. If they have not brought forth the play they thought and hoped they had they have at least restored to Broadway one of the drama's most engaging performers—Henry Daniell. He is quite his old self again—suave, menacing, chilling, expert.

It's tricky stuff, this "Murder Without Crime," and of the school of "Rope's End," but without that play's writing, or its suspense and tingle. Here in a Mayfair flat, Stephen's flat, you meet Stephen, whose wife has walked out on him, as he is entertaining his mistress, Grena. There is a telephone call. The wife, Jan, is returning. There is a violent scene between Grena and Stephen—and a scuffle. Grena is stabbed with a handy dagger and Stephen tosses her into the ottoman. Now along comes the sadistic Matthew, with long-nurtured hatred for the desperate Stephen, and for two acts Matthew, as played by the urbane and sinister Henry Daniell, tortures his man. The author has a twist for his final act, a twist of the payment-deferred variety, but it is not enough to save his play—or to make it. Stephen, as the play ends, finds himself facing a new horror, that of being charged with a murder he didn't commit.

It's all there for you on the stage of the playhouse in which Laurette Taylor used to romp in "Peg o' My Heart." It's there in a labored play, of the mood of "Rope's End" and "Angel Street," but never in their class. The parts are badly written, the characters sketchily drawn and each of the four seems to be more than mildly feeble-minded in practically everything that is done and said.

The ladies of the evening, Viola Keats and Frances Tannehill, are hardly in the play at all. Miss Keats gave a first-rate account of herself here in "The Distaff Side," but there is little that she or any other actress could do with the part of Jan. The gentlemen, Bretaigne Windust and Henry Daniell, do the work. Mr. Windust, an amazingly versatile young man of our show shops, has done the staging of this play and to him falls the role of Stephen. He played last night under the handicap of severe laryngitis and perhaps a postponement of the premiere would have been advisable. He went through it gamely, however, and was still around at the finish—as Mr. Daniell wasn't.

Mr. Daniell, let it be again recorded, is one of the most capable men in his profession, an actor of enormous fascination, and whatever the comparative values of the New York and London productions of "Murder Without Crime" I suspect that he brings to the role of Matthew more skill than it ever had in London's West End.

The Messrs. Del Bondio, Weatherly and Windust, audaciously on their own in the absence of Massa Dwight Wiman, have provided a handsome production and a Raymond Sovey setting for "Murder Without Crime," and it is apparent that they spent time and thought in the preparation of it.

But the Cort is still looking for a good play.

"Murder Without Crime"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 19, 1943

Bretaigne Windust Directs and Appears in Imported London Hit Thriller

By LOUIS SOBOL

GRADUALLY, anyone who attends the theatre often enough must come to the distressing conclusion that British audiences are more tolerant and undoubtedly more appreciative than their American allies. At any rate, I am convinced every time a fairly successful London play crosses the ocean, it loses something with each flowing mile. Otherwise, why is it that only on rare occasions does a London import receive a hospitable reception in New York?

Anyone who wanted to be disagreeable could shame me, of course, by pointing to "Angel Street" or perhaps to "Night Must Fall" or a dozen others through as many years.

Provocative Title

Now take the play which came into the Cort Theatre last night under the provocative label "Murder Without Crime." It was not a shy, obscure little drifting, knocking meekly at Broadway's doors for a kindly hearing. The fact is it had run successfully in London for many months and tugged cheers from enthusiastic audiences. Last night, according to certain witnesses who shall be unnamed but who saw the play in London, too, the New York production was far more handsomely mounted—its cast had more distinction.

In spite of which, none of it came off quite. Just when it promised to thrill—it fluffed. Just when it appeared the dullness of the expository first act was to give way to the excitement of denouement, nothing happened that wasn't to be expected.

"Murder Without Crime" came to New York under the most promising auspices. It had the versatile genius Bretaigne Windust as its director and a leading character, Mr. Windust, for the benefit of the uninitiate, directed not only "Life With Father" but that loveable play of assassination and gore, "Arsenic and Old Lace." His was a notable connection with "Amphitryon 38" and "Idiot's Delight."

Mr. Windust is very much the ace of the theatre, yet this reporter must record that his was a wooden, stiffish, dreary performance last night. Let me hasten to add, however, that Windust could not have been his customary pliable self—he was obviously suffering excruciating tortures from a fearful case of laryngitis.

But Mr. Henry Daniell as the psychopathological bogey-man suffered no vocal distress. His troubles rather were the stuffy, stilted, unbelievable lines furnished by author J. Lee Thompson. Daniell as the saturnine Matthew kept popping in and out at the most disconcerting moments, to the annoyance of Stephen and finally to most of us sitting down below. The bore an actor can make of himself when a script demands—my, o my!

This four-character play is not precisely a Whodunit in the strict sense of the term. After the first ten minutes of the play there is no longer mystery to hold the audience spell-bound or horror-bound or even halt its gum-chewing.

Surprise Finish

Stephen (Windust) has neatly disposed of lovely, slightly careless and inexcusably emotional Grena and the remainder of the play sees him writhe and suffer while the melancholy Matthew, who explains he is something of a blend of masochist and sadist, puts the torture chamber screws to him to watch him squirm. Even the surprise finish wasn't too much of a shock judging from lobby comments of non-professionals who had guessed it by the second intermission.

Raymond Sovey's living room set is effective and worthier of more distinguished proceedings. The two handsome young women of the cast acquitted themselves creditably—Frances Tannehill as Grena, Viola Keats as the estranged wife, Jan.

A fellow is tempted to be as nasty as Matthew and express the opinion that it might have been better for all concerned if Co-Producers Windust, Del Bondio and Weatherly while considering "Murder Without Crime" had made more effective use of the ottoman than stuffing a body in it as Stephen did. They might have stuffed the play into it and sent the chest floating on the Atlantic—back to more appreciative London.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 19, 1943

Murder Without Crime Triumph for Henry Daniell

By BURTON RASCOE

IF THE NEW producing first of Del Bondio, Windust & Weatherly, which presented Murder Without Crime at the Cort last night, has a run-of-the-play contract with Henry Daniell (and it better had, otherwise the play will go to pot), the movie directors, who have been relegating Mr. Daniell to occasional, rather ignominous bit parts, will be (I suspect) biting their nails and kicking themselves for many months to come. For Murder Without Crime looks to me like a smash hit, and it is certainly a personal triumph for Mr. Daniell. He makes the play.

At first blush, it would seem as though Murder Without Crime were simply tailored to order for Mr. Daniell; for he has ordinarily been confined to parts at once blase and sinister. But mere cast of countenance would not have sufficed Mr. Daniell in the arduous and complicated role he created last night. The part requires very considerable melodramatic technique; for he has to torture a man almost incessantly through five scenes and three acts, using no other means of torture except words. And he has to do this against rather weak support on the part of Bretaigne Windust. He has, in effect, to carry Mr. Windust's part as well as his own in order to preserve the illusion. In other words, he has to dominate the scene so thoroughly that you don't notice, at the time, certain weaknesses inherent in the role as played by Mr. Windust.

The play is a psychological thriller rather than a murder story or mystery. You correctly guess the denouement at the end of the first act. The suspense depends upon two things: the number and variety of the sadistic resources of Matthew (Mr. Daniell) and the unfolding of the motive behind Matthew's exquisite refinements of cruelty. The motive, as finally revealed, doesn't make sense; at least Matthew's explanation of it doesn't. I think any intelligent psychologist would say that Matthew's treatment of his victim could only arise out of emotions of quite another character than those he attributes to himself. But, if you scrutinize the play too closely, you also discover that the plight of Stephen (Mr. Windust) at the end is even more desperate that it was in the beginning. Happily, you don't analyze this play while you watch it unfold, because Mr. Daniell makes it his job to see that you don't.

In the opening scene, Stephen has just brought to his flat, which he rents from Matthew, a night club singer with whom he is having an affair. His wife has left him; in fact, has run away with another man. But just as he and the singer are about to retire for the night, his wife calls him on the telephone and says she is coming right up. He, hitherto, has led the singer to believe that he is going to divorce his wife and marry her; but his response to the phone call, and his desperate attempt to get her out of the house before his wife arrives, convinces her that he has merely used her. In jealous rage, aggravated by champagne and dope, she attempts to stab him. In the scuffle that follows, the knife plunges into her breast and Stephen hides the body in an ottoman, just before Matthew comes up from below, ostensibly to borrow a book, but because he surmises what has happened. Matthew's exercise in sadism begins there and does not let up until just before the final curtain.

The first scene, between Stephen and Grena (Frances Tannehill), is pretty bad, because in spite of the somewhat sensational physical aspects of Stephen's lovemaking, it is not a convincing performance. To last night's audience the scene seemed so brazen and yet so mechanical that there were titters, where the director (Mr. Windust) obviously intended there should be gasps of outraged modesty. Mr. Windust was handicapped by an attack of laryngitis last night, which restrained his delivery; but, throughout, I think, he was a shade short of realizing the possibilities of his role. The two other members of the cast, Frances Tannehill and Viola Keats, were good. Mr. Windust's directing, indeed, was admirable for everyone except himself; but, then, he took over the role only a few days ago because of the illness of Michael Dyne and it is likely that he will improve in it.

Among the inherent weaknesses of the play is that J. Lee Thompson, the author, tended from time to time to forget that he was writing a melodrama and threw in some bits which sounded like a Noel Coward comedy. This would be enough to destroy the mood, if Mr. Daniell had not sufficient resources to yank the play back into key again. He has, and the play, therefore, is thrilling.

"Run Little Chillun"

NEW YORK TIMES
August 14, 1943

Hall Johnson Folk Play With Music, 'Run, Little Chillun,' Is Revived at Hudson With Louis Sharp, Caleb Peterson

By LEWIS NICHOLS

A DECADE AGO, after rehearsals in shabby little halls of Harlem, "Runn, Little Chillun" came down to Broadway and built up a pleasant engagement among a public prepared to overlook its faults for its virtues. It has been seen in various places since then, and last evening Lew Cooper in association with Meyer Davis, the orchestra leader, and George Jessel brought it to Broadway again, opening the revival at the Hudson. Once again it has its virtues and its faults, the preponderance of evidence being on the side of the latter, and once more it is setting out to find a public.

The virtues lie, of course, in the music. Hall Johnson wrote both the play and its new songs, and he has arranged the spirituals which make up the rest. When the cast of "Run, Little Chillun" is singing "Do You Love My Lord?" "Nobody Knows de Trouble I See" or the title song, the voices and their blendings are excellent. There are numerous good singers and Mr. Johnson has trained them according to his tradition. The revival meeting which luckily forms a good part of the last act definitely comes under the heading of virtue, as does part of another sort of service in the first act. But after that unfortunately must come a period.

• • •

For Mr. Johnson as a playwright does not have the wealth of talents of Mr. Johnson the musician. His story is of two Negro churches, with the pagan one enticing members from the other. The tale of the bedeviled young minister beset by yearnings of the flesh unfortunately sometimes assumes the aspect of the ridiculous, and a good many of the lines last evening were drawing impersonal giggles from the audience. Also, a public which has gone out at night to hear the Hall Johnson singers finds scenes of dull words badly played more than trying. If he had been a perfectionist, Playwright Johnson would have used the layoff from Broadway to build up his play.

As in the case of the words and music, the acting is as bad as the singing is good. Louis Sharp is the Rev. Jones and Caleb Peterson his son, Jim, the young pastor who was tempted. Mr. Peterson is wooden, which apparently Jim temporarily was not. Edna Mae Harris is Sulamai, the temptress, and last evening at least, some of her acting was encouraging the gigglers. The role of Charlie, the mail carrier, who mainly sings, is well done by Charles Holland; and Bertha Powell is fine as the rotund Sister Flossie. Clarence Muse has directed, with Felicia Sorel staging a very fancy orgiastic dance and Perry Watkins designing the scenery. Unfortunately the suspicion remains that probably the chillun' should just sing the songs and not attempt the play.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 14, 1943

Run Little Chillun Great Art

By BURTON RASCOE

I MUST BEGIN by saying I am profoundly and humbly grateful to Hall Johnson, to his production associates and to the 70-odd members of the all-Negro cast of Run Little Chillun, which opened at the Hudson last night, for one of the most beautiful, most thrilling, most touching things I ever saw or heard in my life.

Run Little Chillun is simply a great, an incomparable work of art, an event of the first importance in the theater. I am still so much under the spell of it, as I write, that it is hard to get these words down on paper. Not since the opening night of The Green Pastures have I been so excited about anything displayed on the stage.

Run Little Chillun is a deeper, subtler work of art than The Green Pastures; it has more facets of interest even as pure entertainment, and its implications, both intellectual and emotional, are far greater than the Roark Bradford-Marc Connelly play. Whether you take it as sheer theater or as an unusual and disturbing drama of the intimations of Good and Evil, it will, I believe, shake up a lot of your complacencies. The Skin of Our Teeth is elementary horseplay in comparison with it.

Here, by means of story, spectacle, animated tableaux, choreography, words and music (all voice) you are initiated into a strange new world of sensation—sensations elementary and primitive and sensations highly complex and antagonistic. Here is a contagious ecstacy, running the whole gamut of naked sensation from pure eroticism to religious transcendentalism.

All of the stuff of which primitive religions are made—desire, self-love, love, hate, fear, the impulse to belong to something or some group, the instinctive feelings about a life beyond life, the sense of aloneness and dependency—here you have manifested in the flesh and expressed in simple, natural, lovely song.

The book and music by Hall Johnson has to do with the rivalry between two Negro religious sects—one pagan and the other orthodox Baptist, and about how the son of the Baptist preacher was tempted toward the new religion through his illicit love for a loose girl of the bottoms, whose only desire in life is revenge upon the women who treat her as an outcast, and how the erring son was brought back into the fold.

This is, as you will see, a modern parable of the Old Testament stories of the sinners who forsook Jehovah, the stern God, and ran after the fleshpots of Egypt and the false gods of the damned.

The climax of the first act is a corybantic dance in the ritual of the New Day Pilgrim. It is the essence of voodooism, abandoned, wild, voluptuous, sensuous and beautiful. There is nothing cheap or vulgar about it, as, for instance, there was about the dance something like it which Josephine Baker used to do in Paris.

In contrast to this is the climax of the second act, which is one of religious ecstacy in the church meeting of the Baptist congregation. Here, too, is an incredible beauty, in which every face, every gesture, every cry, every emotion, is at once natural and meaningful, a sheer joy to watch.

There are many bits in this last scene which are comical, but the over-all effect was so solemn and so moving that few last night were moved to laughter. And the singing in this scene by Hall Johnson's famous choir, which first appeared in Green Pastures and later sang in many Hollywood films, is heavenly.

Ringing praise must go not only to Mr Johnson but also to Clarence Muse, who directed the play and to Felicia Sorel, who arranged the dances. Every single member of the cast is so good that it would be invidious to mention any several of them. I can only direct you to the cast box and say that individually and collectively they were superb.

This is an entertainment you simply must experience. It is a rare one.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 14, 1943

Lew Cooper Offers the Hall Johnson Negro Musical First Seen in 1933

By LOUIS SOBOL

WHEN talented and spirited Negro folk get together on the stage, they usually bring to the theatre something that shouldn't be dismissed with a shrug and a wave-off of disdain. When they pour out a munificence of robust, inspired spiritual chorals bearing the Hall Johnson trademark, certainly only the deaf of ear and the dead of emotion can remain unimpressed.

It seems a shame, therefore, that the return of "Run Little Chillun" last night to the Broadway fold after a hiatus of approximately a decade doesn't tug a whole-hearted cheer from this corner. We sat through it patiently and hopefully, fully aware of its worthy background, of its dignified mission and of the hurrahs which greeted it when it opened here in 1933 (the day after the banks closed) and the even more enthusiastic reception that Los Angeles gave it shortly after, where it ran for a year or so.

But the dreary gabble-gabble leading to the unfolding of the skimpy, uninspired plot was a tough price to pay for the reward which came at intervals—although in great, generous measure in the final scene—when the entire cast collected to deliver those beautiful Negro vocal symphonies. It was a burdensome penalty, considering that it was a night on which rivers of sweat drenched audience and actors alike. Someone, it seems, forgot to provide an adequate cooling system for the Hudson theatre.

Tells of Odd Sect

Such story as there is throws the beloved son of the Rev. Jones under the spell of a vivacious but morally careless hussy, a good-time gal named Sulamai. This gay Jezebel drags her timid lover to the meetings of the Pilgrims of the New Day, where there are devilish goings-on, including a suspicion of voodoo and a lively orgiastic ritual that has all the earmarks of the kind of saturnalia Will Hays would frown off the screen. It is noisy and exciting and brought back memories of the torrid numbers that used to feature the Cotton Club and Connie's Inn night club revues.

Unfortunately, Elder Tongolo's protege, Brother Moses, young disciple of the Pilgrims, is a susceptible fellow who finds the flirtatious Sulamai someone for whom he would most willingly leave the fold. This is bad business, for Elder Tongolo can toss lightning around and do general damage to man and beast when his dander is up—and up it goes leading to that final scene in the second act when Jim Jones goes back to the church, his reverend pa and his wife—and Sulamai meets a deserved if tragic fate.

Final Scene Scores

Perhaps, all can be forgiven for that final scene when the congregation gathers in a good, old fashioned revival meeting in the Hope Baptist Church. This is the Negro at his best and truest—delivering the anguish of his soul—and the joy—in the magnificent spiritual chants—finding his release in dances which defy formal rhythm. In this scene Louis Sharp as the Rev. Jones, Olive Ball as the Rev. Sister Luella Strong and Helen Dowdy as the forsaken wife, Ella Jones, were poignantly effective.

"Run Little Chillun" is chiefly Hall Johnson—it is his book, his songs and his musical arrangements. The talented Clarence Muse directed and must assume some of the blame for the tedious stretches of dialogue. Perry Watkins designed the costumes and the distinctive settings.

If all concerned will just throw away the book and content themselves with the Hall Johnson choral wails and the Felicia Sorel choreography, and find a cooling system for their theatre, I see a fragment of hope for this latest revival. Especially, if they have the good sense not only to start the proceedings but to close with "The Star Spangled Banner" as the Hall Johnson choir delivered it. I never knew how magnificent a melody the National anthem could be—until I heard it sung last night.

"Run Little Chillun"

NEW YORK POST
August 14, 1943

The Hall Johnson Choir In "Run, Little Chillun!"

By WILELLA WALDORF

LOVERS of Negro singing have a treat in store for them, for Hall Johnson's "Run, Little Chillun!" was revived last night at the Hudson Theatre with all the fixin's. It is nearly ten years since Robert Rockmore first produced it at the Lyric. The current presentation is sponsored by a triumvirate that includes Lew Cooper, Meyer Davis and George Jessel. It still takes its time getting under way, and there are crudities in spots, both in play and production, but there is nothing quite like the boundless gusto of a Negro acting troupe when it starts whooping it up at a revival meeting, and the matchless Hall Johnson Choir is again on hand to deliver spirituals with stunning effect.

The plot, as of yore, is still just a Lawd-versus-Satan item knocked together as an excuse to present two rival religious meetings in the deep South. Jim, son of Rev. Jones, pastor of the Hope Baptist Church, is lured away from Ella, his lawfully wedded wife, by Sulamai, the local Jezebel, who has taken to attending the open-air moon festivals of a pagan cult called the Pilgrims of the New Day, which goes in for orgiastic exercises in the woods featuring tom-toms, ritualistic dances, and sermons on the nature of sin by Brother Moses, who speaks only to interpret the silent commands of Elder Tongola, head of the cult. Elder Tongola hasn't uttered a word for seven years and looks it.

Moon Worshippers Stage Pagan Orgy

Jim, the preacher's errant son, is tempted and falls to the extent of attending one of the moonworshippers' gatherings in the woods, but is shocked when Sulamai starts flinging off her clothes to join the dance orgy, and forcibly carries her from the scene.

In the meantime the congregation of the Hope Baptist Church, thoroughly familiar with the distressing details of the Jones' family's struggle to rescue Jim from the toils of Satan's temptress, devotes one of its revival meetings to petitioning the Lord to bring the lost lamb back into the fold. Chances of saving him look promising when it is revealed that the devastating Sulamai has transferred her roving eye from Jim to no less a personage than Brother Moses, Elder Tongola's mouthpiece.

While a terrific thunder storm rages without, the struggle for Jim's soul rages with equal intensity in the Hope Baptist Church, rising to a crescendo of sound and excitement when Sulamai is finally killed by a bolt of lightning at the very door of the church.

At the highest pitch of the struggle, when it appeared Satan would soon be dragging Jim off to Hades despite the strenuous efforts of Pastor Jones' loyal flock, we began to feel the flames of the Netherworld roaring around us, but discovered, on investigation, that Evil had not yet triumphed. It was becoming very hot in the theatre because the cooling system had broken down.

Revival Meeting in The Hope Baptist Church

The ritualistic exercises of the Pilgrims of the New Day, rising to a swirling climax in the writhing and swooning of Felicia Sorel's dancers' bring the first act to a close excitingly enough to make up for some rather slow going earlier in the play, but it is the revival meeting in the Hope Baptist Church that makes "Run, Little Chillun" worth a trip to the Hudson.

There have been numerous revival scenes in Broadway plays, but this one, as staged by Hall Johnson and Clarence Muse and performed by the choir with brilliant dramatic and tonal effect, sets a mark for most of the rest to shoot at. The singing of this fine Negro choir is enthralling to listen to and tremendously impressive to anyone who enjoys hearing spirituals done as only Negro singers can do them.

Those in the audience who arrived in time for the rise of the curtain also had a chance to experience one of the most affecting interludes of the entire evening. There is no orchestra in the pit for this production, and instead of turning on a wheezy gramophone somewhere in the basement, the Hall Johnson Choir lined up on the stage and sang the Star Spangled Banner as we have never heard it sung before. If you decide to attend "Run, Little Chillun!"—and it's a good idea—be sure to arrive in time to hear these Negro singers make something genuinely spinetingling out of the National Anthem.

'RUN LITTLE CHILLUN'

"Run Little Chillun," play with music by Hall Johnson; staging by Clarence Muse; presented by Lew Cooper, in association with Meyer Davis and George Jessel, at the Hudson Theater Friday, August 13, with the following cast:

Sister Mattie Fullilove.....Bessie Guy
Sister Flossie Lou Little.....Bertha Powell
Sister Mahalie Ockletree.....Rosalie King
Sister Judy Ann Hicks.....Maggie Carter
Sister Lulu Jane Hunt.....Eloise Uggams
Sister Susie May Hunt.....Eva Vaughan
Brother Esau Redd—Chairman Deacon Board
Robert Harvey
Brother Bartholomew Little,
Wardell Saunders
Brother Goliath Simpson,...William O. Davis
Brother Jeremiah Johnson..Randall Steplight
Brother George W. Jenkins....Elijah Hodges
Ella Jones.....Helen Dowdy
Clarence Jackson.....Edward Roche
Bessiola .....Miriam Burton
Organist .....Awilda Frazier
The Rev. Sister Luella Strong.....Olive Ball
Rev. Jones—Pastor of the Hope Baptist Church .....Louis Sharp
Jim—Son of Reverend Jones..Caleb Peterson
"Charlie"—Mail Carrier....Charles Holland
Sulamai .....Edna Mae Harris
Sister Mary Lou Mack.....Violet McDowell
Elder Tongola—Leader of "Pilgrims of the New Day" .....Service Bell
Brother Moses—Young Priest of the Pilgrims
P. Jay Sidney
Mother Kanda—Daughter of Tongola,
Maude Simmons
Sister Mata—Priestess of the "Pilgrims"
Fredye Marshall
Brother Jo-Ba—Herald of Joy..Walter Mosby
Mag—Sulamai's mother....Gertrude Saunders
Belle—of Toomer's Bottom...Viola Anderson
Mame—of Toomer's Bottom..Myrtle Anderson
Sue Scott—of Toomer's Bottom Lulu B. King
Sexton of the Hope Baptist Church,
Adolph Henderson
Brother Absalom Brown.....Roger Alford
Blind Man .....Clarence Harris
"Run Little Chillun"—Singer, Charles Hopkins

NEW YORK SUN
August 14, 1943

'Run Little Chillun,' Negro Folk Play, Is Revived at the Hudson

By WARD MOREHOUSE

"RUN LITTLE CHILLUN" considered as a play, is hardly a play at all. It is scanty drama, clumsy of dialogue and situation, but in its final scene, that to which it has been building and which is the reason for it all, it achieves a certain power and grandeur through the singing of Negro spirituals in a meeting house way down South.

It is such a little church as you could find in the bayou country, deep in Louisiana or Mississippi—a tiny, battered church with its paint peeling, vestibule rotting, window panes cracked and pews warped, and all the gyrations and hysteria, the powerful massed singing and the ensemble effect give you a revival meeting that is grand stage stuff. And it is all particularly effective when the choir is Hall Johnson's, as it was last night.

I wish it were more of a play. I wish it were even half a play. "Run Little Chillun" was first exhibited hereabouts a good ten years ago, presented by Robert Rockmore during those strange days of the Bank Holiday. Remember? Now here it is again, this time sponsored by Lew Cooper, in association with Meyer Davis and George Jessel, and given its first presentation last evening at the Hudson, a playhouse which has had, in its day, fare in as great a variety as any in all the town.

Don't look for much in the way of dialogue, situation or even acting as "Run Little Chillun" unfolds. Much of it is shoddy stuff. But you find yourself waiting, as are the players, the dancers, the rhythm beaters and certainly the singers, for the scene to change to the interior of the Hope Baptist Church, and there, I assure you, those good sisters and the brothers really cut loose. During the long closing scene "Run Little Chillun" comes to life as you had been knowing it would.

The company, when considered as actors and not singers, doesn't compare with some of the all-colored troupes New York has seen in recent years. I kept looking for more richly comical types such as the Rev. Sister Luella Strong, played by Olive Ball, who ascends the worn red carpet to the narrow altar and joins in the shouting.

"Run Little Chillun," Negro folk drama, has exciting moments when Choirmaster's singers are at work. But as a play it is a bad one and the ten years that have gone by since it was first produced have not helped it. It achieved a run of a hundred performances or so when done in 1933.

This revival will not come near an engagement of such duration.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 15, 1943

The Evening Would Be Fine If There Wasn't Any Play

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IT appears that *Run Little Chillun*, which some years ago played for a while on Broadway, has had a vigorous life throughout the country—in Federal Theater and other productions—ever since. It seems safe to ascribe much of its off-Broadway appeal to the limited sophistication of most off-Broadway audiences. For this all-Negro melodrama is a crude tale of sex and religion in which, at times, it is hard to tell one from the other. Now and then a certain intensity overrides the general clumsiness, and here and there a certain naïveté is not unattractive in itself. But as drama *Run Little Chillun* is mostly either inept or absurd, and the chief virtue of the evening is a lot of good choral singing.

As for the story, it deals with a slut who is ostracized by the Baptists after corrupting the minister's son, and then turns to a far more unconventional sect called the Pilgrim's of the New Day, who don't care much for her either after she brings out the beast in one of their dignitaries. She has both her victims in quite a state for some time, but at the end, so far as I could judge, she was suddenly struck dead.

The wages of sin are, however, pretty long in coming. Mr. Johnson, in addition to numerous scenes of private lust and personal struggle, stages two full-dress religious services—an outdoor one in which the Pilgrims go in for voodoo and work up to quite a substantial orgy, and an indoor one in which the Baptists come out way ahead. Going at it with gusto, the Baptists come out way ahead on the singing end and provide the best moments of the evening.

Hall Johnson composed some fairly good music for the show, besides introducing some well-known spirituals; and with the Hall Johnson choir in good form and Charles Holland effective as in several solo numbers, *Run Little Chillun* has its singing rewards. Unfortunately it is not a real musical show. It is only a bad play with music, whose plot refuses to know its place.

As the sluttish Sulamai, Edna Mae Harris reveals more personality than acting ability. This distinction remains true of the company as a whole; partly, perhaps, because the direction never clamps down on them, partly because their roles are so crudely written. Mr. Johnson, the composer, was done in by Mr. Johnson, the playwright.

"Run Little Chillun"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 14, 1943

Ten Years Later

By HOWARD BARNES

AFTER ten years "Run Little Chillun" is still more of a concert than a musical melodrama. The original Hall Johnson show has been changed so little since it had the misfortune of opening just as the banks closed that it might as well be set down as a revival. What matters is that it has the same musical excitement and folklore fascination that made the hapless 1933 presentation something to see. In its contrasting climaxes of primitive religious rites and naive holy roller excesses, it builds up colorful atmosphere. In the spirituals of the Hall Johnson Choir, it is always impressively eloquent.

• • •

Unfortunately the Hudson offering concentrates so heavily on the atmosphere and the hymns that it frequently forgets to be a theatrical attraction. The melodramatic embellishments of the Johnson fable are always inherent in the action. They are rarely brought to the surface to give the show the upheaval of action which might have placed it in a particular niche of fame. All the naivete and exuberance of the Negro spirit comes through in the production. It still drags badly.

Paradoxically enough, this is due to good performing and good staging as well as rather badly organized continuity. Clarence Muse has staged the doings of an evangelical set in a deep south Negro colony with savage emphasis. He has reproduced the emotional fervor in the rival Hope Baptist Church to superb effect. In between these two big scenes, he has lost what thread of a human drama there might have been in a melodramatic fantasy. The chief performers, on the other hand, are so good in fragments of straight drama that they make one annoyed that the personal fable was not pinned down on the stage in a consecutive and motivated background for the musical numbers.

• • •

The music is as wonderful as you would expect it to be. The choir sings as magnificently as ever, giving harmonic modulations to familiar hymns and Johnson's own compositions. The dancers do their stuff with exuberant abandon in the New Day Pilgrims Meetings. The contrast between primitive Jungle rites and the exceedingly similar ritual of the Baptist Church is striking. I could have stood more elaboration of the strange relationship between the darktown trollops, played excellently by Edna Mae Harris and the son of the preacher, portrayed as excellently by Caleb Peterson. I would have liked to see more of such performers as Viola Anderson and Myrtle Anderson, who were strictly wrong gals in the community. There is superb music in "Run, Little Chillun," but not much sustained make-believe.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 14, 1943

'Run Little Chillun,' Negro Choral Drama, Disappointing in Return

By JOHN CHAPMAN

WHEN Hall Johnson's "Run Little Chillun" opened ten years ago I like it, feeling that the choral spectacles which ended each of its two acts were stirring enough to carry the rest of the show. When "Run Little Chillun" reappeared last night at the Hudson Theatre I didn't like it.

The choral spectacles of this Negro drama were still there, but somehow not as moving as once they were; and in between was some pretty silly and badly acted plot. I got to thinking, during the splendid singing of the Hall Johnson chorus, that it might have been interesting if the Negroes, instead of the Russians, had revived "Chauve-Souris" the night before. It would have been livelier and quite magnificent vocally.

A Revival Meeting

"Run Little Chillun" is about Good People and Bad People. The Good go to Hope Baptist Church. The Bad go to the services of the New Day Pilgrims, who have jungle fun in the woods outside town. There's a scarlet woman, Sulamai; and there's a strayed lamb, a young preacher whom Sulamai lures down the path to the New Pilgrims.

The Pilgrims' meeting, which ends the first act, is a well-staged African orgy of drums, wild dances, and weird, wordless songs. The Hope Baptist meeting which ends the play—with Sulamai dead and the young preacher back in the fold—is an American Negro orgy of prayer, confession, spirituals and religious fits. It, too, is well staged, but last night it seemed overlong in a steaming theatre for which somebody forgot to buy or wouldn't buy the ice.

The Choir Is Tops

The Hall Johnson Choir is a superb musical instrument, and when it sings such things as "Steal Away," "O, Jesus, Come Dis-a-Way," "Nobody Knows" and "Return, O Holy Dove" you're really hearing spirituals. And there are solos by Charles Holland and Bertha Powell which are well worth an ear—if you can hear them through the racket the stagehands make back of the curtain.

Edna Mae Harris plays Sulamai, the scarlet woman, right lustily. Caleb Peterson seems ill at ease as the young parson, and Olive Ball plays a grim Reverend Sister excellently. The sets are simple and seemingly unworkable.

"Chauve-Souris 1943"

NEW YORK SUN
August 13, 1943

'Chauve - Souris of 1943,' Presented at the Royale, Lacks Variety and Charm

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THAT droll and unctuous clown, Nikita Balieff, is no longer here to give his ingratiating ways to a Russian revue and "Chauve-Souris of 1943" suffers without him. As revealed last evening at the Royale, it is definitely on the dull side, lacking in both variety and spontancity, and I can't see much chance for it.

Leon Greanin put this show together. He assembled the material and supervised the production and he wanders through the evening in Balieff's old role of interlocutor, but he is without the moon-face: Balieff's magic and "Chauve-Souris of 1943" has little of the charm of its predecessor. Despite the efforts of the well-intentioned Mr. Greanin and an eager and hard-working company, the Royale's new production emerges as a pretty doleful affair.

"Chauve-Souris of 1943" is presented in two parts. There are numerous numbers and most of them are short and fast. The best of the evening's material is to be found in "Romances of Tchaikovsky," "Katinka's Birthday" and the closing "Wedding in Ukraine."

With general interest in all matters Russian being what it is, the idea of a Russian revue at this time sounded like a good one, but there is none of the new Russia in Mr. Greanin's production. He relies on the old "Chauve-Souris" formula, but this time the spirit and imagination of Balieff's production are absent. Absent, too, is that picturesque impresario, Morris Gest of the slouch hat and flowing tie, who used to stand around gloomily at the rear of the auditorium.

You'll like some of the scenery in this new revue. There are pretty groupings, too, and pretty faces here and there, but it is a company without outstanding talent, and even that old favorite, "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers," is a disappointment. There is, in fact, considerable amateurishness about the whole affair.

"Chauve-Souris of 1943" considered as professional and competitive Broadway entertainment, doesn't come off.

NEW YORK TIMES
August 13, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Chauve-Souris 1943"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

NO DOUBT it is only one who looks upon the world through dark glasses rather than dark eyes who will find that all is not perfect at "Chauve-Souris of 1943," which opened last evening at the Royale. On the stage are some obviously willing people, pleasant, agreeable and holding the wistful hope that Broadway will like them. They dance, they sing, they play short sketches in Russian and English, but when they have finished they leave more than a suspicion of fear that the current version of a famous revue is not living up to its name nor the evening to the standards of Forty-fifth Street.

• • •

It is quite possible that "Chauve-Souris" really was the late Nikita Balieff, who organized it and was in command when first Morris Gest brought it to America. He was round and merry, and his murderous version of English gave the revue a disarming quality of great charm. In the present edition Leon Greanin, its producer, offers the introductions and it is nothing against him to say he is not the renowned Balieff; no one ever could be again. But Mr. Greanin does not ease the formality of the evening, and it is an evening when informality is desperately needed to smooth over the fact that most of the material is not very good.

To answer the first question that will be asked, "The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" is back again, although this time it has a sequel: As the toys go off, members of the Soviet Army are seen singing a marching song. Also among the numbers are various others to show this is 1943, including a dreadful song about an American WAC and a Russian sniper, which while it will not ruin Soviet-American relations will not cement them either. Another item is called "Hobo-Genius Chorus in 4F," which when it gets by the title and Mr. Greanin turns out to be pretty good choral singing—as it would have been under any other name more like "Chauve-Souris."

• • •

Serge Soudeikine has designed the settings and the costumes, which are colorful as they dart across the stage. A couple of dozen people take part in the choruses and sketches. There is a lively folk dance, some Gypsy music—Georges Doubrovsky is one of the leading singers, and he is good—and a number which will arouse memories, "Katinka's Birthday." The pity of it all is that between moments of cheerful music and dancing lie long stretches of material that is incomprehensible or is more suitable for the broken hours of a night club or, on numerous occasions, would best be forgotten altogether. Credit Mr. Greanin and his colleagues with trying; the regret lies elsewhere.

"Chauve-Souris 1943"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 13, 1943

A Russian Defeat

By HOWARD BARNES

THERE are echoes of smart Slavic vaudeville in the new version of Balieff's Chauve-Souris. The vocal choruses are rousing. There is some fine and fancy dancing, from squat kick-ups to ballet pirouettes. Meanwhile, the show has incorporated several numbers from earlier editions of the revue, including "The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" and "Katinka's Birthday." What is missing is the casual precision and timing which made for an exciting entertainment twenty years ago. The doings at the Royale are exuberant but tedious.

• • •

There is no good reason, of course, why Russian vaudeville turns should be any smarter than these antics are in any tongue today. Leon Greanin has assembled a spirited company for his production. He plays conferencier much the way Balieff did originally. All that he has failed to do is to put a bit of variety into what passes as a variety show. After you have heard the various singers do their stuff a dozen or more times and have admired the agility of the dancers, you are likely to wonder if this wasn't where you came in.

• • •

There are occasional efforts in this new Chauve Souris to key the piece into the contemporary Russian scene, but they are rather dismal. The counterpart to "The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers," for example, which has a group of Red soldiers brandishing antique muskets as though they were defending Stalingrad, is embarrassingly dull. So is the scene in which a Russian sniper and an American Wac get together and sing about their respective exploits. There has been a great dearth of dramatic imagination throughout the production. The performers are generally stymied.

• • •

The best numbers in the revue are the singing and dancing ensembles. "The Gypsies" has good spectacle and staging in addition to some elegant tunes. "Wedding in Ukraine" is a colorful production number, if far too long. Among the individual turns are Georges Doubrovsky's "Song of the Flea" and a competent bit of dancing by Simeon Karavaeff. It is a big company in this Chauve Souris and a very willing one. It is only a pity that it is kept going over the same material as though it were on a treadmill, or a merry-go-round. Russian vaudeville would appear to be no more vital than the local product.

'CHAUVE-SOURIS—1943'

New version of Balieff's Russian revue; presented at the Royale Theatre Thursday evening, August 12, 1943, by Leon Greanin, by arrangement with Mme. Nakita Balieff and with cast including Marusia Sava, Zinaida Alvera, Vera Pavlovska, Tatiana Pobers, Jeanne Soudeikina, Dania Krupska, Georgiana Baumister, Norma Slavina, Georges Doubrovsky, Michael Dalamatoff, Simeon Karavaeff, Michel Michon and Arcadi Stoyanovsky. Music compiled and arranged by Gleb Yellin; English lyrics by Irving Florman; settings and costumes designed by Serge Soudeikine; staged by Michel Michon; choreography by Vecheslav Swoboda and Boris Romanoff.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 13, 1943

There's a New 'Chauve Souris'—But, Alas, a New Russia, Too

By JOHN CHAPMAN

RUSSIANS in Russia last night continued heroically to push back the German line; push it back upon Kharkov, ever back toward the Dnieper. Russians in New York last night quite gallantly tried a more difficult feat—to push back time. Time wouldn't budge much.

They—these affable New York Russians—put on a mostly new edition of the late Nikita Balieff's "Chauve-Souris" at the Royale Theatre. They were engaging and easy about it. They said, in effect, "Come to our party. It won't be formal. Nobody's going to get plastered, either, and there won't be any fights. Maybe we can all have a good time."

I wish I could report a very wonderful time, but the best I can say is I didn't go home mad. It wasn't that basketball-faced Nikita Balieff was dead and his Admiration Cigar ad smile was gone. Last night's Leon Greanin, as conferencier, was in the Balieff tradition, with a R-r-russian accent and a smile which came nicely through a heroic beard. It was just that . . .

As Time Goes By

Well, "Chauve-Souris" socked Broadway in February, 1922. "Orphans of the Storm" was being billed as "D. W. Griffith's Empire of New Emotions." William Desmond Taylor had just been murdered, Fatty Arbuckle was awaiting his third trial and Bluebeard Landru was awaiting execution.

In that February of 1922 some grand shows were running, but maybe they wouldn't be so grand now. (Which wouldn't be their fault, but ours, and time's, for changing.) "The Bat," "Dulcy," "Captain Applejack"; Frank Craven in "The First Year" and Willie Collier, Florence Moore and lovely Wilda Bennett in the first "Music Box Revue." Marilyn Miller was dancing in "Sally" and Lenore Ulric was dusting her unabashed torso with a great big powder puff in "Kiki." "The Cat and the Canary" was to open in a couple of days.

So you can see it is going to take a powerful big shove to push time back, if anybody ever can.

Old Favorites Done

Last night's entertainers presented some of the old numbers for love's sake—"Parade of the Wooden Soldiers," a cute little pantomime called "Love in the Ranks," an amusing dance in an amusing set titled "Katinka's Birthday." They came out in song and story.

But they were short of comedy. A hobo chorus was funny and the audience wanted more; but there wasn't much more. There was Simeon Karavaeff, a good dancer and fair monologist, who did a "Hot-cha Chornia" number that was a tricky combination of Russian and tap steps.

There were ballets and tableaux, and one choral series that had something of the new Russia in it because a few of the songs were by a top-flight musical humorist, Dmitri Shostakovich.

Ballet numbers were so-so, and Broadway happens to be blessed with very fine ballet this year. To me the best of the dancers was nimble Jack Gansert, who may not have been a Russian. Most of the song solos fell to Vera Pavlovska, who is wonderful on the eye and all right on the ear. Dania Krupska dances Katinka.

Leon Greanin and his troupe have not done anything to besmirch the Balieff memory. Greanin was in the Balieff company in Paris in 1929, has been with the Moscow Art Players, most recently managed the Jooss Ballet. But, as Burns Mantle said when Balieff himself returned with a new production in 1931, the first "Chauve-Souris" was too good.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 13, 1943

Perhaps It Was Petrillo Trouble That Spoiled the Chauve-Souris

By BURTON RASCOE

I MAY BE WRONG, but I strongly suspect that Leon Greanin had some Petrillo trouble at the last minute just before the curtain arose on his Chauve-Souris of 1943 at the Royale last night. Indeed, the circumstantial evidence seemed to be that the poor chap had practically a paralytic stroke of Petrillo trouble between one number and the next; for, standing in front of the curtain as conferencier, or master of ceremonies, he announced a number in rather specific detail only to discover, when he got behind the curtain, that the number had been canceled while he was out front.

If my guess is correct, Mr. Greanin is so naive as not to have known, until last night, that if you are going to put on a show which has as much as one note blown on a harmonica in it, you had better consult Mr. Petrillo about arrangements for this, because Mr. Petrillo may rule that, in this particular case, you have to hire 10 harmonica players not to play in order to have one union harmonica player play that one note.

From the program, it would seem that Mr. Greanin intended to have some guitars, accordions and a bunch of balalaikas up on the stage playing music by Shostakovich, Dounaevsky and Zakharoff, and that he was still under the delusion that this music could be part of his show until about 9:17 last evening. One minute later he was disillusioned. Five parts of the next number and three whole numbers scheduled for Act II were dropped out. From a remark Simeon Karavaeff made to the orchestra leader—a remark that certainly wasn't in the script—Mr. Karavaeff was apparently surprised to see the orchestra still in the pit when he came on to do his monologue and dance.

Something Went Wrong

Maybe, of course, my surmise is wrong and that Mr. Greanin didn't neglect to fix up matters with Mr. Petrillo but only neglected to fix up his show. But something certainly went wrong with the revived Chauve-Souris last night. The whole thing was disorganized. It couldn't have been for lack of rehearsals; for all the best numbers are the ones the same players have been doing down at the Russian Kretchma Restaurant on 14th St. for ages. Even the players, ordinarily a spirited bunch of Russians, looked and acted as though chairs had been pulled out from under them. The whole thing was more than dull and disappointing; it was sad, with an odd sort of sadness.

The worst thing about this is that Mr. Greanin's lines, as a conferencier, were much better than Nikita Balieff's, and if the cast had been able to put on the Harvest Festival number as they put it on at the Kretchma it probably would have made a greater hit than the Wooden Soldiers and the Katinka numbers did in the Chauve-Souris of 20 years ago. As it was, the numbers: Katinka's Birthday, Night Idyl, the Russian Shawls and Mr. Karavaeff's kazotzki tap dance topped everything in the old Chauve-Souris except the Wooden Soldiers and Katinka numbers. The other numbers were pretty awful because they were so dispirited.

• • •

Greanin's Quips Better

To those who didn't remember the moon-faced Balieff's very comical appearance, Mr. Greanin must have seemed very funny indeed, for his Russian-English was just as funny as Balieff's and his quips were far more adroit and understandable.

But, as time wore on, he apparently had so many worries he was anxious for the final curtain to descend. He wouldn't let Jeanne Soudeikina or Mr. Karavaeff take bows much less give encores, although the applause for them demanded it . . . Those two performers, by the way, were practically the whole show, although Marusia Sava and Arcadi Stoyanovski in the Cat Serenade and Dania Krupska in Katinka's Birthday also found considerable favor with an audience which had a large Russian contingent.

"Chauve-Souris 1943"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 13, 1943

The Wooden Soldiers Need a Sergeant

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MY recollections of the old *Chauve-Souris* are remarkably pleasant if not notably distinct. There was, of course, the *Parade of the Wooden Soldiers,* and there was *Dark Eyes,* a song which, odd as it may seem, a lot of us were actually hearing for the first time. There was Katinka, too, and above all M. Balieff, a wonderfully droll little man who came before the curtain, less it seemed to talk about the show than to try out his English in a voice that went up when you expected it to go down and that suddenly stopped when you assumed it would go on.

My recollections of the new *Chauve-Souris,* though only half an hour old as these words are written, are passably pleasant, and again not notably distinct. The show is undeviatingly picturesque, in its dancing, its singing, its tableaux, its costumes, its steps; the pictures merge into one another and all that remains is their color. A little of the show is plangent; much of it is light-hearted; almost all of it it likeable. It is full of romantic echoes of a timeless Russia that give way, now and then, to the heroic voice of the Russia of today. But only now and then; this is a show with its heart in the past—and, I'm afraid, with much of its lure in the past as well.

• • •

For nice as the show is in tone, it is by no means up to snuff in treatment. It lacks distinction, it lacks showmanship, it lacks zip, and above all it lacks variety. One folk song or dance seems very much like another. The village green is the village green, whatever its geography; and though it always makes a pretty picture, the trouble is that after a while those who cavort on it have a much better time than those who merely look on. Furthermore, though simplicity can have great charm in real life, the image of it in the theater calls for skill. There is not enough of that skill, in either the individual performances or the general effects. You had only to see the Wooden Soldiers parade last night to be sure of this. Now and then a Michael Dalmatoff or Simeon Karavaeff breathes something into the proceedings but it is personality rather than talent; while the direction lacks the sureness and precision, the dash and pace, that can transform the merely agreeable into the really fetching.

The final case in point is Leon Greanin, who has assumed M. Balieff's old duties before the curtain. Mr. Greanin is likeable, he is sometimes droll, he is heavily accented, he is exotically bearded. But he somehow misses – for one reason because he imitates M. Balieff too much. He doesn't give the show the lift it needs. He is not quite funny, as the show is not quite fun.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 13, 1943

Leon Greanin Presents New Version of Nikita Balieff's Revues

By LOUIS SOBOL

THE full moon face and the fat good humor of the bulbous Nikita Balieff were missing, and perhaps that is why the "Chauve-Souris" which came into the Royale Theatre last night seemed to lack the spin and hilarity of all the "Chauve-Souris" (six, I think there were), which brought cheer to Broadway in other years.

Instead of the beaming lunar-mugged Balieff pleading for his audience to listen while some one came out to "sink sot sonks," we had a tallish gent, Leon Greanin, who looked like a cross between Monte Woolley and G. B. Shaw and who spoke like Gregory Ratoff after a tussle with Rhetoric III.

But no "Chauve-Souris" offering its hot or cold borscht can be totally unpalatable. In all fairness, a reporter must confess delight with the thrilling "Trepak" folk dance and a cheer for the Harvest Festival with its enticing melodic background furnished by such contemporary composers as Shostakovich, Knipper, Dounaevsky and Zahkharoff.

Wooden Parade

The Wooden Soldiers paraded by stiffly as in all "Chauve-Souris," but it was such a mild and prissy march this time, and in the second act Katinka, with her starched fancy clothes and her rosy cheeks and her trim legs celebrated her 16th birthday, while her pals and relatives with their faces stuck into apertures in the special backdrop mugged and wept or, when the occasion demanded, looked blank.

One gentleman did stop the show—a fellow named Simeon Karavaeff, who, as a Russian sailor on a delicious binge in New York, danced to "Otchi Chernya" in swing time and tore down the house. No stranger—this Simeon, for I have seen him strut his exciting routine nightly at a little place downtown known as the Russian Kretchma, and once shared a vodka, which lays me open to suspicion, I suppose, of being heavily subsidized.

Leon Greanin, a forbidding looking gentleman, tried hard to be winning and droll and entertaining. Perhaps it was too much to expect that he should be at his best on this opening night with the shadow of the jolly, moon-faced Balieff hanging around to stick a tongue of jeer at him for trying to win the favor that was his, the Balieff's, more than a decade ago.

Perhaps, too, we're going in too heavily on this revival business, even though the oldsters arrive in brand new Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. At any rate, Greanin was less than effective—and so was the "Chauve-Souris of 1942," which I am afraid with all its huffing and puffing and panting won't be able to catch up with the veteran, which was "Chauve-Souris" the First.

Wrong Mood

I am a slightly dyspeptic gent who occasionally manages to tug a bit of fun out of Russian dances and songs, sad or cheery, when I watch and listen from a table in a Russian restaurant. Usually I have my "chi" and the "beef strogonoff" is about to arrive on its hot plate. Under such circumstances I have been known to let out an enthusiastic yelp over a high kick or a high note by a Russian emigre. Last night I had nothing but my program in my hand, an unoccupied seat by my side and Mr. Greanin on the stage trying to convince me I was having a good time.

He was wrong. I wasn't.

NEW YORK POST
August 13, 1943

Leon Greanin Does a Balieff In "Chauve-Souris 1943"

By WILELLA WALDORF

NIKITA BALIEFF, who invented the "Chauve-Souris," is dead. So is Morris Gest, who brought it to this country in 1922 and kept importing new editions every two years or so thereafter until 1931, when the Broadway critics reluctantly agreed that most of its original charm and innocent merriment had evaporated.

The little show born in a Moscow cellar had become too civilized for a "Chauve-Souris," yet not civilized enough to compete with Broadway revues on their own terms.

It perished and has since been just a happy memory to theatre-goers of the twenties, who sometimes recalled "Katinka" and "The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" with a warm feeling in their hearts, and told wonderful stories of the moon-faced Balieff who always acted as master of ceremonies and took the greatest care never to become too familiar with the English language.

Balieff was a Broadway character. His introductions of simple little sketches were generally more amusing than the sketches themselves. His informality was ingratiating, his gayety contagious. As the "Chauve-Souris" itself lost its novelty and its ebullient spirit, Balieff remained his own beguiling self. People went to the theatre just to see him beam and to hear him recklessly battling English idioms in an accent that became more intricate and more hilarious as the years passed.

An Attempt to Regain the Old Spirit

Last night, nearly twelve years after the last of "Chauve-Souris" faded away, Leon Greanin brought up the subject again at the Royale Theatre, by special arrangement with Mme. Nikita Balieff, who sat in at rehearsals and even staged at least one number.

Mr. Greanin, who came to this country as manager of the Jooss Ballet, and stayed on after most of the group returned to England, calls his production "Chauve-Souris 1943."

As a member of the original "Chauve-Souris" audience, we should like to be able to salute the reborn revue with loud cheers, and to report that it is as gay and rollicking as of yore, especially since nearly everybody connected with the venture is vigorously Russian, and Russian vigor is a quality that can't be saluted too often these days while Hitler's hordes are being pushed back all along the Eastern front.

Unfortunately we can lift only the feeblest of cheers. The new "Chauve-Souris" simply doesn't come off, either as an entertainment a la Balieff, or as a Broadway revue. It endeavors to strike a diplomatic note somewhere in between, and succeeds in falling down rather badly on both counts.

Even though they have brought back the "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" and a new version of "Katinka" in which the original Katinka's daughter celebrates her sixteenth birthday, it is pretty obvious even to well-wishers that the old formula is hopelessly outmoded, and while Mr. Greanin, who acts as master of ceremonies, catches the gleam, and even some of the accent, of Balieff, he succeeds chiefly in looking quite a lot like Monty Wooley in a less irascible mood than usual.

Some Rousing Russian Choral Singing

The best thing the Russians of this troupe do is to sing in chorus, and the finale of the first act, "Harvest Festival," has spirit and tonal beauty and a bright, warm setting by Serge Soudeikine, but the performance as a whole is poorly staged and the much sought-after quality of informality sometimes becomes merely an embarrassing amateurishness, especially when the company is aping Broadway revue tactics.

There are charming moments in the new "Chauve-Souris" and some good singing here and there, with music by Tchaikovsky, Mousorgsky and Shostakovich interspersed with some banal jingles unhappily supplied with English lyrics. But much of it is dull, the orchestra is poor and the performers are at ease only when whooping it up together in the native tongue.

"Chauve-Souris 1943" is a disappointment.

"The Merry Widow"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 5, 1943

An Old Favorite Takes on New Life

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THERE is nothing much gayer or more melodious than *The Merry Widow*, and in the New Opera Company's fresh and glamorous production it is far and away the best of Broadway's recent revivals of operetta. (*Rosalinda* may soar higher in its one great act, but it sinks much lower in its other two.) The Viennese charm of *The Merry Widow's* music and the Parisian chic of its background fuse into a delightful period piece; and the New Opera Company has wisely worked to keep it a period piece. Wisely, because Europe before Sarajevo was the last era that was truly glittering and carefree, and perhaps the last that had style.

Much of that style and glitter were evoked last night. Under Robert Stolz (who conducted the Viennese premiere of *The Merry Widow* in 1905) the orchestra played with extraordinary dash and zip. Walter Florell's costumes flooded the stage with color. George Balanchine's choreography is enchanting. Marta Eggerth looked attractive in the title role and sang pleasantly; and as the prince, Jan Kiepura sang with vigor and authority.

To be sure, it was not all perfection. Most of the comedy is dreary, but at least it is not offensively skittish; and in the chief comedy role Melville Cooper is suave and relaxed. As an actor Jan Kiepura is as romantic as a carpet-sweeper and as stiff as a broom—though for my money a stick is no worse than a ham. The third-act *Girls at Maxim's* wasn't sung well, and perhaps the first act never found its stride. But these are trifles.

Indeed, they could be serious drawbacks and still not matter much, in view of last night's shimmering virtues. The score remains a delight—the three world-famous waltzes, the no less famous *Vilia*, that classic caper *The Women* ("Girls, girls, girls") and a good deal more; and with Stolz giving it the cachet of old Vienna, it could hardly have sounded better. (The one unpleasant thing about the music is that its composer, from all reports, has played ball with the Nazis. But he won't get any royalties from 44th St.)

• • •

But the music, last night, found its equal in the dancing, which is probably the finest thing that Balanchine has done on Broadway. The cancan at Maxim's not only became a thing of great skill and allure, but unlike any other cancan I've ever seen, completely evoked its own period—a period that had never heard of jazz. But Balanchine's finest job is a waltz ballet that is a miracle of lightness and loveliness, while the *pas de deux* of Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff called forth, and deserved, an ovation.

Taste and talent went into last night's production, which, like *Oklahoma!*, gives the town something to be proud of and happy over.

'THE MERRY WIDOW'

Operetta in three acts; music by Franz Lehar; new book material by Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts; lyrics by Adrian Ross; production directed and staged by Felix Brentano; presented by Yolanda Mero-Irion and the New Opera Company at the Majestic Theatre Wednesday, August 4, 1943, with the following cast:

The King	Karl Farkas
Popoff	Melville Cooper
Jolidon	Robert Field
Natalie	Ruth Matteson
Olga Bardini	Ethelyne Holt
General Bardini	Ralph Dumke
Novakovich	Gene Barry
Cascada	Alex Alexander
Khadja	Arnold Spector
Guests	Josephine Griffin, Mark Farrington
Nish	David Wayne
Sonia Sadoya	Marta Eggerth
Prince Danilo	Jan Kiepura
Clo-Clo	Lisette Veres
Lo-Lo	Wana Allison
Frou-Frou	Bobbie Howell
Do-Do	Babs Heath
Premiere Danseuses	Lubov Roudenko, Milada Mladova
Premier Dancers	Chris Volkoff, James Starbuck
Gaston	Karl Farkas

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 5, 1943

A Very Merry Widow

By HOWARD BARNES

THE new season has been gladdened by a felicitous revival. Franz Lehar's "The Merry Widow" has been brought to the Majestic with taste, melodic eloquence and pageantry. These are important elements in an operetta. They place this latest New Opera Company production at the top of the list in its particular field. With Jan Kiepura and Marta Eggerth singing the leading roles to beat the band, Melville Cooper contributing some effective comedy and the corps de ballet outdoing itself in the memorable Lehar waltzes, "The Merry Widow" is a light opera triumph.

• • •

If anything, the offering is too abundant with its riches. Reprises, encores and dance numbers keep the show running well on toward midnight. Judicious cutting would not hurt the production. It is still uniformly delightful. The great "Merry Widow Waltz" is interpreted with skill and variety in several numbers. The "Vilia" song which Miss Eggerth sings charmingly and Kiepura's rendition of "The Pavilion" are in the best tradition of operetta vocalizing and the dance routines of Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff are something to see.

• • •

The piece is supposed to be modernized, even to changes in the score, but it fortunately retains all the mythical kingdom cutups and the tunes are as familiar and hummable as ever. What has been accomplished with a piece which first opened here some thirty-five years ago is a freshening of pace. Since a smooth plot continuity has been devised by Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts, it rarely shows its age. Since Walter Florell has clothed the company in gorgeous costumes and Howard Bay has devised striking settings, the externals of the show are as fresh as paint.

• • •

There is little of the stuffiness about this revival which has characterized so many refurbished operetta presentations in the past. The stars sing with enthusiasm and perform with restraint and conviction. Cooper, Ralph Dunke, David Wayne and Gene Barry keep the tiny plot revolving happily, and Robert Field and Ruth Matteson sing and make love pleasantly in a secondary romance. You have to hand it to Lehar, of course. "Maxim's," "A Dutiful Wife," "I Love You So" and the other numbers would serve to carry a pretty dull revival. The point is that a handsome production, talented performers, George Balanchine's choreography and a contagious good-nature about the proceedings make "The Merry Widow" a notable addition to show-shop exhibits.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 5, 1943

Jan Kiepura and Miss Eggerth Could be Merrier in 'The Widow'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IF YOU are going to put on "The Merry Widow"—or any other musical show, for that matter—you damn well better be merry about it. The New Opera Company had practically everything on its side at the Majestic Theatre last night, but it couldn't quite manage to be gay. So this is a regretful notice.

The music was there. In the pit was a honey of a string section under the loving and knowing direction of Robert Stolz—who conducted the very first "Merry Widow" in Vienna in 1905. From it oozed, sweet and fragrant, the familiar Franz Lehar melodies.

Up on the stage, as Danilo, was Jan Kiepura, and you don't get a voice like Kiepura's in Broadway musicals once in a blue moon. Opposite him in the title role was his wife, Marta Eggerth, who is quite beautiful and who possesses an effective pianissimo in the high notes. Abetting him were many handsome girls, several George Balanchine dancers and Melville Cooper, an experienced comedian.

It's All in Earnest

With all these items to its credit "The Merry Widow" should be in the bag, but I'm afraid it is not. Everybody is too serious about the enterprise. Kiepura, who has battled his way across many great opera stages, including the Metropolitan, makes one feel that he is up there for the sole purpose of singing the hell out of his role.

It's all right to sing the hell out of "La Boheme" or something like that because it is what grand opera customers pay their money for; but it isn't the way to get along in operetta or musical comedy. In these lesser mediums a tenor should relax and try to have some fun.

The physical production seems sort of scraped together. I can remember many prettier gardens in which everybody sat around to hear the prima donna sing "Vilia." The ensemble dances are so-so, but solo numbers by Lubov Roudenko, James Starbuck, Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff are excellent, and a crowd of ballet maniacs were a-whoopin' and a-hollerin' for them last night. The dance lover is an unstable exhibitionist.

West Forty-Fourth St. now embraces a capsule history of the musical comedy business. On the north side is "The Merry Widow," whose waltzes and girls from Maxim's have been affectionately remembered since 1905. In this one the song and dance cues are like this: "Sing your new song," somebody says to Miss Eggerth. "Not until you see the dance," says Marta. So a dance comes on and then she sings "Vilia."

On the south side of 44th St. is "Oklahoma!" Here, too, are melodies that will be remembered with love. And here the tunes and the story and the dances are so beautifully put together that there is no need for clumsy cues. "The Widow" is a curio—a beautiful curio when it isn't done too earnestly.

"The Merry Widow"

NEW YORK SUN
August 5, 1943

'The Merry Widow,' New-style, Brings Color and Lehar Score Into Majestic

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE clocks spun back last night to the year of 1907 and to the playhouse called the New Amsterdam; to the clamor of Maxim's in Paris and the gay intrigues of the Marsovian embassy, and once again Lehar's "Merry Widow" waltz, hauntingly recurrent throughout the century, held a New York audience under its spell.

Now, after a time elapse of thirty-six years, Donald Brian and Ethel Jackson are no longer gliding about the stage. The theater is now the Majestic, the company is not Henry W. Savage's, and it's a production that gives billing to a vast swarm of specialists. The name of Lehar appears in microscopic play-bill type, but it is still Lehar's score and, despite all the new-fangled trimmings, last night was very much his night.

This new-season production of one of the American theater's most famous pieces is not the "Merry Widow" of tradition, nor did Yolanda Mero-Irion and the New Opera Company intend that it should be. It is a production that has color, beauty, ballet effects and imagination—and a good deal of it is lovely. But the selection of Jan Kiepura for the role of the Prince is an unfortunate one. The role of Danilo has always been one associated with dash and gaiety. Kiepura, a singer, can certainly sing it, but Danilo needs also to be played and danced. And when the waltz comes around Mr. Kiepura steps aside and turns it over to the ballet. Marta Eggerth, in fine voice and looking quite fetching, has a far happier time with the role of Sonia.

There are book revisions along with new lyrics, for this 1943 production. The book was never one of the world's funniest, not in 1907 or in any of the many presentations that "The Merry Widow" has since had in all parts of America, and the scenes now written and played for comedy fall pretty flat.

The New Opera people have done some bright casting for several roles. Ruth Matteson, a rising young dramatic actress, quite astonished all of us by bursting into song. Melville Cooper brought his quiet drollery to the part of Popoff, and such performers as Ralph Dumke, Gene Barry and Ethelyne Holt come through nicely.

Jan Kiepura gives to Danilo vocal power that the part has seldom had, and perhaps this will be some compensation to the playgoers who come to this production with only one Danilo in mind, the romantic Donald Brian of bygone years. Brian, to not so doddering oldsters, was the inevitable Prince Danilo, just as the character of Sherlock Holmes could be associated only with the name and the image of William Gillette.

For some of us in last night's first audience at the Majestic the most thrilling moments came when the orchestra (Robert Stolz, conductor) played the overture. Lina Abarbanell, in Row C, who succeeded Ethel Jackson during the original New York run, seemed about to swoon—or to rise and go waltzing in the aisle. And that would have been all right, too.

So, with last evening's pleasant and pretty exercises, first-nighters are now dismissed until next Wednesday.

NEW YORK TIMES
August 5, 1943

New Opera Company Presents Revised Version of Franz Lehar's Operetta at the Majestic

By LEWIS NICHOLS

LAST FALL the New Opera Company paused in its serious duties to help Mr. Vroom put on "Rosalinda," and that having set the town a cheerful waltz, it turned last evening with another associate—Yolanda Mero-Irion—to Franz Lehar's "The Merry Widow." There is life in that one also, more life as they do it at the Majestic than just the "Vilia" song and the "I Love You So," which are the usual synonyms for Lehar at work on an operetta of royalty and Maxim's.

As producers of revivals of familiar works, those responsible for the newest one have spared nothing. To sing they have reached out and tapped Jan Kiepura of opera, screen and concert hall, and Marta Eggerth, his wife and also from same. For the dances they have gone to George Balanchine, who presumably wouldn't be expected to understand three-quarters time but who obviously does. Comedy in operettas usually is somewhat this side of the stuff of angels, and so they have bolstered that department with Melville Cooper, who perhaps is no angel but has a dead-pan understanding of humor. The result is a diverting and colorful revival of one of the catchiest of operetta classics.

• • •

Mr. Kiepura's voice gathers in operetta as a matter of course, and since the songs were written to be sung, it perhaps is of no account that he is not a finished actor and that he moves heavily on the stage; one cannot have all the graces. Miss Eggerth is beautiful, with a voice which last evening did not entirely match, for in some of "Vilia" she was indistinct, and even a momentary slurring of "Vilia" is one of Broadway's cardinal sins. As a background for the principals there is a singing chorus that is excellent and well-trained.

Since the libretto of the "Merry Widow" has felt the years, Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts have touched it up, keeping it in the original spirit and mood and not bothering to follow the usual practice of adding jokes about sugar rationing and meat shortages. Mr. Cooper, an old hand at the comic game of conspiracy, plays Popoff, the Ambassador, giving the part an amiable and light touch. For General Bardini there is Ralph Dumke; for Jolidon, Robert Field.

• • •

Mr. Balanchine's contributions also have been excellent. The can-can of the third act is fast, the waltzes are graceful. Presumably it was Mr. Balanchine who directed the male odds and ends—Mr. Cooper and others—in the dance of "The Women," which is a cheerful parody filled with good nature; and in Lubov Roudenko, Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff he has dancers who are immense. The last two did the Mersovian dance and the one with the "I Love You So" song, and on both occasions stopped the proceedings.

Finally, in the pit, conducting the Lehar score with a loving touch, is Robert Stolz of "Zwei Herzen" fame, and no amateur at waltzes himself. The overture last evening was punctuated by applause, a tribute to an operetta that has remained popular through the years and which now is receiving a worthy revival.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 5. 1943

Jan Kiepura and Marta Eggerth Head Cast in Revival of Operetta

By G. E. BLACKFORD

"THE MERRY WIDOW" was reborn last night at the Majestic Theatre where Yolanda Mero-Irion presented the New Opera Company's revised, modernized and popularized version of the famous Franz Lehar-Victor Leon-Leo Stein operetta with Jan Kiepura and Marta Eggerth in the stellar roles.

There have been many revivals of this notable work since it first appeared in 1907 at the New Amsterdam Theatre. Your correspondent must confess that he was not present at the auspicious debut back there during the regime of the first presidential Roosevelt, nor at many of its return visits.

He cannot with any sincerity compare last night's entertainment with those which previously have borne its honorable title. He cannot contrast the Jan Kiepura as Prince Danilo of Marsovia with former Prince Danilos. He cannot draw from other Sonias to evaluate Miss Eggerth's abilities in the role of the merry widow whose millions drew suitors like flies, but who chose the heir to the throne of an impoverished little kingdom just because she loved him.

Neither can your reporter honestly describe the suave inanities of Melville Cooper as Popoff in the light of the conceptions of this comedy role that have gone before. Nor the beauty of the production, the loveliness of the ballet and chorus, the humor of the lyrics or the quality of the accompanying music.

Nor does it really matter whether previous offerings of "The Merry Widow" were better or worse. Worse they could have been; were they better, were they more lavishly presented or more rollickingly played, then it is my great loss—and yours if you did not see them—not to have had the privilege or opportunity to have enjoyed them.

Charming Story

For the New Opera Company's production is a fine evening in the theatre. It is a lovely, relaxing, charming, laughing love story set to enchanting music, brought up to date in the new book by Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts, spiced by the lyrics of Adrian Ross. It is gorgeously costumed by Walter Florell, masterfully staged and directed by Felix Brentano against the beautiful sets conceived by Howard Bay and richly bound together by Robert Stolz's vibrant conducting.

And while we are passing out bouquets, let's not forget the dancing. The choreography by George Balanchine is perfectly tuned to the tempo and spirit of the story, providing a kaleidoscopic melange of grace and beauty.

As to individual merits in the huge cast, the list would reach from here to there. Show-stoppers cropped up in every scene. There was Jan Kiepura's "Maxim's" in the first act, the Marsovian dance by Milada Mladova, Chris Volkoff and the Corps de Ballet in Act Two, Miss Eggerth's lovely "Vilia," the novelty "The Women" (Girls, Girls, Girls), and Kiepura's "Kujawiak," sung in Polish in the third portion of the performance. And when they stopped it, they stopped the show but cold.

It really is hard to tell whether the audience or the players enjoyed the evening more. The players certainly were in fine fettle; such infectious merrymaking could be nothing but genuine. And if the fortunate spectators were anything but happy about it all, I don't know what they were making such a fuss about with all that bravo-ing and applauding.

"The Merry Widow"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 5, 1943

The Merry Widow Revived by the New Opera Company

By BURTON RASCOE

IF ROBERT STOLZ and his orchestra had kept on playing the music of The Merry Widow I don't think the audience would have objected very much if the curtain had never gone up at all on the New Opera Company's revival of the famous operetta at the Majestic last night. It is that kind of music and it was that kind of an audience. The response to the overture, a medley of the Lehar tunes, directed with gusto by Mr. Stolz, was positively ecstatic. The whole house was animated by it.

Now come the tears...of disappointment. Don't get me wrong. This production of The Merry Widow, in most respects, is a lovely, even an enchanting thing. I believe it will have a great success. And it deserves it.... But if you're old enough to remember Lina Abarbanel in the role of Sonia and Donald Brian (in New York) and George Damarel (on the road) in the role of Prince Danilo, in the original production which ran for about three years, you are going to say this is not the old Merry Widow—not by a long shot.

The trouble boils down to the unhappy fact that Martha Eggerth (Sonia) and Jan Kiepura aren't romantic, and neither one of them last night, least of all Miss Eggerth, was merry. Miss Eggerth is pretty, in fact beautiful. She has a nice, rather thin voice, which is equal to the demands of her songs in this show. But she is much too reserved and proper. She lacks vivacity. She gave no gayety to the role.

Substitute Waltzers

Although Jan Kiepura was so nervous throughout the first act last night that his pitch was too high, he sings beautifully. You can't understand a word he sings (his biggest hit last night was with the Kuiwiak, which he sang in Polish, which was just as understable as his songs in English) but his tone is nice. He is attractive and young—too young and innocent looking in fact. He has a sweet, babyish sort of face. You can't believe he could ever have got acquainted with Clo-clo, Lo-lo, Frou-frou and Do-do, much less have known them intimately, and and there is nothing about him of the dashing, romantic, man of the world that Danilo is represented as being. What's more, Mr. Kiepura, believe it or not, has never learned to waltz. So Sonia and Danilo don't waltz in this version of The Merry Widow.

That, of course, to old-timers is like Hamlet without Hamlet. Those waltzes of Sonia and Danilo are what you remember most tenderly about the original (American) version of The Merry Widow. But Felix Brentano, the director, has figured out an ingenious substitute for the waltzes Sonia and Danilo do not do. He lets Miss Eggerth and Mr. Kiepura do a couple of steps and then makes them go and sit down while he brings on Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff to do the waltzes and they tear the house down.

In fact the biggest hits of the evening were scored by that couple of ballet dancers and by another couple, Lubov Roudenko and James Starbuck, with a corps de ballet directed by George Balanchine. Parts of the audience (and I don't think it was altogether a claque, though some of it undoubtedly was) stood up and cheered Miss Mladova and Mr. Volkoff, who are very good indeed—attractive as well as accomplished.

• • •

Encores

Mr. Kiepura was forced to give an encore of Maxim's and he and Miss Eggerth responded with an encore after the applause that greeted their duet, I Love You So. The audience also demanded an encore when Miss Eggerth sang Vilia. She sang that song, by the way, in a gold evening gown before a full assembly in Sonia's house. If I remember rightly, Lina Abarbanel sang that song in a woods and it was responded to by Danilo with the Pavilion.

Melville Cooper was excellent as Popoff and a great favorite with last night's audience. The nish of David Wayne I liked very much but I didn't care particularly for the other comic characters, although when the seven of them—Messrs. Cooper and Wayne and Ralph Dumke, Robert Field, Arnold Spector, Gene Barry and Alex Alexander—did the burlesque song and dance, The Women, they drew the loudest applause of any song number of the evening.

The opening scene is breathtakingly lovely, owing to the settings by Howard Bay and the costumes by Walter Florell; and the setting for the scene in Maxim's restaurant had all the old glamour about it, with an added attraction, a very nifty can-can number indulged in by some very seductive gals... It's not the old Merry Widow, although strangely enough, Lina Abarbanel, who was in last night's audience, thought it was "wonderful." She's still wonderful; I wish she had been Sonia last night.

NEW YORK POST
August 5, 1943

Jan Kiepura and Marta Eggerth in a Revival of "The Merry Widow"

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE PROGRAM at the Majestic Theatre last night provided an interesting study in what Broadway calls billing. A bevy of singers, actors, producers, book writers, directors, conductors, choreographers, designers and technicians were hailed in bold-face type for their contributions to the New Opera Company's revival of "The Merry Widow." And, if you put on your spectacles and inspected the page closely, it was possible to decipher, in the smallest type of all, the words: "Music by Franz Lehar."

Looking back in the files, we find that eight previous revivals of "The Merry Widow" have passed in review before this department in the past fifteen years or so. Some were quite good, others quite bad. All endeavored valiantly to do something about the book, and in the end it all came down to the fact that "The Merry Widow" would have been dead and buried years ago but for the lilting Lehar music. Any way you produce it, the score's the thing.

The New Opera Company's production which opened at the not-so-air-cooled Majestic last night is by far the most opulent version of the famous old work we have ever encountered. The scenery by Howard Bay is strikingly effective, especially his representation of Maxim's in the third act. Walter Florell's period costuming is lusciously colorful. Furthermore, the New Opera Company has recognized the fact that Lehar's music is the thing, even if he isn't awarded big print in the program. It has provided a good orchestra to play his melodies, and engaged no less a personage than Robert Stolz to conduct them in true Viennese style.

As if this weren't enough to bedazzle any audience in these parlous times, it has gone further and enlisted Jan Kiepura, the Polish tenor, and his fetching wife, Marta Eggerth, the Hungarian soprano, to sing the roles of Prince Danilo and Sonia, the Merry Widow. Melville Cooper, a comedian of no mean gifts, has been induced to come all the way from Hollywood to wrestle with the role of Baron Popoff, and the dancing contingent, directed by George Balanchine, features at least three leading artists from the Ballet Russe.

A "New Version" of an Old Operetta

The mere thought of so much splendor in one production is enough to send almost any lover of Viennese operetta into a swoon of delighted anti ipation. Having dutifully swooned, we atte ded last night's opening and will now report on it, a bottle of smelling salts by our side.

"The Merry Widow" at the Majestic is a new version of the operetta in that it includes interpolated Viennese music for the dancers, a Polish folk song for Mr. Kiepura to sing at Maxim's, and what is described in the program as a new book by Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts.

It is probably true that the Messrs. Sheldon and Roberts worked themselves into a frenzy writing a new book, but we are regrettably obliged to state that it seemed just as bad as all of the old ones. They had to get on with the plot, after all, and while Melville Cooper is one of our favorite funny men, we found very little to laugh at last night until he ate a banana for no particular reason.

This episode reminded us of Mr. Cooper's first appeaarnce in this country in a play called "Laburnum Grove" in which he ate literally dozens of bananas. After that every time Mr. Cooper came in, we started laughing —at "Laburnum Grove."

Unfortunately it is doubtful if the banana eating will be a regular feature of "The Merry Widow," the banana market being very black at the moment. Doubtless the one Mr. Cooper ate last night was smuggled in to give an added touch of swank to an already dazzling premiere.

Polish Lyrics and A Kiepura Concert

New lyrics for last night's production were credited to Adrian Ross, who might have saved himself the trouble, for all we heard of them. Mr. Kiepura's Polish accent is so intense that we thought he was singing his Polish number in English until a kind friend enlightened us, and although Miss Eggerth is far ahead of her husband when it comes to speakink Engleesh, we were so fascinated by "Vilia, the Vitch of the Wood" that the rest of Mr. Ross's contributions eluded us.

But, old "Merry Widow" fans will say, there are others singers besides Prince Danilo and Sonia in Lehar's masterpiece.

The answer is, not in this production. When Ruth Matteson, a well-known dramatic actress who, as far as we can remember, never sang a note before in her life, turned up as Natalie, it was evident that the singing was going to be strictly limited to the Kiepura family, and it was.

The Kiepuras put on a regular concert. Mr. Kiepura has a tenor voice that could tinkle a crystal chandelier at five thousand yards, and when he went to work on the old Lehar tunes, he was immense. Possibly it would be better for the show if he didn't take an operatic stance and plunge into Danilo's giddy amours as if he were operating on "Vesti la Giubba," but that's the Kiepura way. Despite all the Lehar, his best work during the evening was his rendition of the interpolated "Kuiawiak" in his native Polish.

Miss Eggerth an Attractive Widow

Miss Eggerth made a slim and attractive Widow, beautifully gowned, better at the acting end than Mr. Kiepura, and equipped with a light, sometimes rather shrill, soprano. They did a bit of twirling to the strains of the celebrated waltz, but the rousing dance moments of the evening were provided by Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff, who stopped the show twice in the second act, and by Lubov Roudenko doing the can-can in Act 3.

The audience, in fact, became so violently excited over the dancers that it was more like the ballet season at the Met. than "The Merry Widow" for quite a while.

Hardly the traditional "Merry Widow," but plenty to look at and a lot to listen to.

"The Two Mrs. Carrolls"

NEW YORK TIMES
August 4, 1943

Elisabeth Bergner Returns to Broadway in the Melodrama 'Two Mrs. Carrolls,' Aided by Victor Jory and Vera Allen

By LEWIS NICHOLS

FOR years, those interested have been seeking a play for Elisabeth Bergner. Back in 1935 she made her first Broadway appearance in "Escape Me Never," and that turned out to be not the perfect drama for her. Last evening she came on for the second time, in the leading role of "The Two Mrs. Carrolls," and that is not the perfect play either. However, it is August and perfection is not universal on the streets off Times Square; so credit the evening at the Booth with being passable if not great, with offering a melodrama that generally holds the interest even if it does not send forth its audience shaking with excitement.

* * *

As is fitting, the evening unquestionably is Miss Bergner's. The play as written by Martin Vale is a bad one, with a droning first act and much spiritless dialogue. But such is Miss Bergner's ability to sweep from a youthful spriteliness to tense emotion that she manages to carry the action far beyond the words: banal conversation sounds real. Not even she can cover up all the lengthy passages when nothing whatever goes forward, but in the second act, where most of the real action happens, she holds her audience in the state of unease which is the proof of melodrama.

The Two Mrs. Carrolls of the title are the first and second wives of an artist. Miss Bergner playing the part of the second. The artist has a roving eye and the habit of trying to dispose of his wives more permanently than he could by divorce. As the author sets down the story, he telegraphs his punches ahead, so the audience is not left worrying about what may happen, but so well do Miss Bergner and her colleagues play it that despite advance knowledge there is undoubted tenseness as the whodoneits' inevitable retribution overtakes the proper party.

* * *

As to the colleagues: Victor Jory plays the artist, giving a good performance in the role of a man of outward charm and inner psychological difficulties. The author has not made the character too clear, but like Miss Bergner, Mr. Jory glosses that over gracefully. Vera Allen is the first Mrs. Carroll, Silano Braggiotti is a friend of the second Mrs. C. and Micheiette Burani, without whom no household in the south of France is complete, is excellent as the maid. Reginald Denham directed and Frederick Fox has designed a comfortable set. While "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" is not the perfect play for which Miss Bergner has been searching, it may at least keep her on Broadway until she can find it.

NEW YORK SUN
August 4, 1943

Elizabeth Bergner Appears in Melodrama, 'The Two Mrs. Carrolls,' at Booth

By WARD MOREHOUSE

ELISABETH BERGNER returned to the New York stage last night after an absence of eight years, bringing the long-deferred murder melodrama, "The Two Mrs. Carrolls," into the Booth. Here is a loosely constructed, straggling play, but one with occasional scenes of terror and excitement.

The authorship is that of Mrs. Bayard Veiller, widow of the master of melodrama who wrote, "Within the Law" and "The Thirteenth Chair," and she uses the pseudonym of Martin Vale. The play now comes to us in two-act form and you get the impression as it wanders along that it has been subjected to no end of tinkering and revision since it was done in London some seasons ago.

A new producing partnership, Robert Reud and Paul Czinner, brings forth "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" and for the staging of it they engaged Reginald Denham. The combination of these talents, plus the skill of the star, provides numerous chill-and-shudder moments, but there are long waits between such portions.

The Messrs. Reud and Czinner present the fable of the moody, brilliant and homicidal artist, Geoffrey Carroll, who tried to poison the first Mrs. Carroll and is quietly and determinedly engaged in the destruction of the second when Mrs. Carroll No. 2 is warned by her predecessor. Having twice failed, the desperate Geoffrey gets better results when he turns the poison on himself.

Not a play of sustaining interest, this new melodrama, and the writing is never an inspired job. The character of the artist is sketchily drawn and his love affair with the dark beauty who comes into his life during the regime of the second Mrs. Carroll is unconvincing.

The elusive, compelling Miss Bergner is an actress of fascination and genuine power and when the script lets her get going her terror is indeed communicable. During the quiet stretches of the play there is little, however, that she can do except wait for her moments.

The Messrs. Reud and Czinner have provided an excellent production, with two effective settings by Frederick Fox. The players are competent enough, but they can't do much with the roles as they are written. I suspect that Henry Daniell was the actor needed for the character of Geoffrey.

Anyway, it's the early season and the town needs new plays, even moderately effective ones, and especially if they bring back people of Bergner's capabilities. It is her first stage appearance here since "Escape Me Never," done in 1935, and welcome she is.

"The Two Mrs. Carrolls" is now in the same block with "Angel Street," but not in the same class.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
August 4, 1943

The Two Mrs. Carrolls Given in Conflicting Moods

By BURTON RASCOE

ELISABETH BERGNER threw away a whole cornucopia of magnificent histrionics at the Booth last night under the mistaken impression that the Two Mrs. Carrolls is a subtle psychological drama like something by Pirandello or Chekhov. Actually it is a loosely constructed and inferior melodrama requiring a sound and brilliant melodramatic technique (such as Judith Evelyn brings to Angel Street, for example) to make it suspenseful and (theatrically speaking) convincing. If Miss Bergner has any melodramatic technique she gave few indications of it last night.

Throughout the evening, in fact, I had the weird sensation of watching two plays at the same time—one in which Miss Bergner was appearing and the other in which the rest of the cast was appearing; and that the two plays bore no relation to each other. Only two members of the cast, Irene Worth and Vera Allen, seemed to have had any realization of the essential nature of the play and projected their parts accordingly; and when they were opposite Miss Bergner they got no help from her.

I can imagine no worse condemnation of Miss Bergner's acting in The Two Mrs. Carrolls than the frequent comment I heard during the single intermission, "She is doing a grand job!" Not that Miss Bergner was making her part thrilling or contributing to the excitement of the play as a whole, but that she was "doing a grand job!"—as though she was giving an exhibition, solo.

* * *

Underplays Melodrama

A solo exhibition, I am afraid, was just what she was giving, and with such singleness of purpose and such absent mindedness concerning her surroundings that several times she threw Victor Jory off and, in the last act she blew the whole scene, making Mr. Jory ridiculous.

She did this by unconscionably underplaying a scene that requires emphasis if not actual overacting. Consider this: Mr. Jory, while she is still barring the door of her bedroom to keep him out, enters by the window to murder her. She utters no cry; she exhibits no sudden apprehension or fright. She, indeed, greets his appearance as though it were a routine experience, mumbles some words and goes through some business nonchalantly while Mr. Jory has to stand there waiting uncomfortably for his cue. From there on what should be mounting suspense to the climax becomes a mechanical and incredible series of unrelated actions. Mr. Jory playing a part in one kind of a show and Miss Bergner playing a part in another kind altogether—one that apparently hadn't anything in Miss Bergner's mind to do with murder.

Miss Bergner, throughout the first act of this play, is marvelous to watch—as Miss Bergner. She has great resources in naturalistic acting. Her gestures, her glances, her pouts, her show of suspicion, her look at her rival when she divines what is occuring between him and her, her simulation of ill health, together with a desire not to be the object of solicitude—all the rich means of projecting character that would be fine in another kind of play are there in profusion.

But they do not contribute to the action of the play. They hold it up instead. Add to this the fact that Miss Bergner has been speaking before the mike so long that she forgets that the stage requires voice projection and you will see how the "grand job" she does in The Two Mrs. Carrolls really handicaps the melodrama. I sat in the fifth row center and failed to catch quite a few of Miss Bergner's lines. Some who were farther back told me they didn't catch much more than half she said.

* * *

Was Hit in London

The play is a revival. It was a tremendous sucess in London about six years ago with Elena Miramova in the role of Sally Carroll and a failure in out-of-town tryouts in America of a version with a different ending from that of the original production. The Robert Reud-Paul Czinner text is the same used in London except for some slight changes in dialogue.

It is about an artist who has tried to poison his first wife to escape scenes and recriminations when he wants to get a divorce from her, who is detected and forced to sign a confession, and who later tries to kill his second wife in the same way and for the same reason when he has fallen in love with another woman.

The settings by Frederick Fox are pleasing to the eye and appropriate in the first act, but too small in the second act. Here Mr. Fox was being as naturalistic as Miss Bergner. He did not want the bedroom of a cottage to be out of proportion to the rest of the house and therefore made it too confining for the action that must take place in it.

Except for watching Miss Bergner, I found no excitement, or even interest in the play because Miss Bergner ruins it as melodrama.

"The Two Mrs. Carrolls"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
August 4, 1943

The Actress Is Better Than the Play

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

CREDIT *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* with Elisabeth Bergner which is a good deal; and with a conventionally effective second act of slow-motion horror. Debit it with very uninspired dialogue, a batch of cliches, and a tedious, inept and strenuously static first act.

The play, which at length settled down as a sinister melodrama, certainly takes its time getting round to the goose pimples. For the first three-quarters of an hour it seems destined to be one of those silly exhibits of sex and artistic temperament invariably laid (in pre-Vichy days) in the sun-drenched South of France. Miss Bergner and her violently artistic husband are a couple of love birds in their pretty villa; but there is a young widow two villas away. Then Miss Bergner turns wan and wobbly on her feet but not because she in the least suspects that her husband and the young widow are carrying on, though they are. Only when the husband's first wife warns Miss B. that he is slowly poisoning her so that he can marry the widow —as years before he tried to slowly poison *her* so he could marry Miss B.—does the point of the story emerge.

The trouble with this extremely slow wind-up is that you aren't skillfully mystified; you are merely misled. The atmosphere is merely amorous, not ominous; the husband only seems the straying kind, not the sinister. The truth isn't allowed to dawn on you bit by bit; it is thrown at you, after an hour of banal talk, at 10 o'clock.

Thereafter the writing continues to be banal, but the situation becomes dramatic, and the struggle between the horrified wife and the relentless husband works up some pretty good suspense.

Miss Bergner's role has the merit of providing her with a variety of emotions, and she herself has the skill and seductiveness to encompass them. With her look and manner that are at once so childlike and so feminine, she becomes by turns effervescent, passionate, pathetic, bewildered and frightened. She is at her best as a gay figure or a pathetic one; in her dramatic moments she has not quite enough authority. But she endows her role with much more than the author has endowed it, and offers a pretty good reason for seeing a pretty bad play.

Once he is able to act the villain, Victor Jory acts effectively; and once he is able to direct horror scenes, Reginald Denham directs well. As the young widow, Irene Worth is rather cinematic in a stagy role; and as the first Mrs. Carroll, Vera Allen is rather stiff in a stagier one.

With a shorter first act *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* would I think, have a longer run.

'THE TWO MRS. CARROLLS'

"The Two Mrs. Carrolls," melodrama, by Martin Vale; staged by Reginald Denham; settings by Frederick Fox; presented at the Booth Theater, Tuesday, August 3, 1943, by Robert Reud and Paul Czinner, with the following cast:

Geoffrey	Victor Jory
Clemence	Michelette Burani
Pennington	Stiano Braggiotti
Sally	Elisabeth Bergner
Mrs. Latham	Margery Maude
Cecily Harden	Irene Worth
Dr. Tuttle	Philip Tonge
Harriet	Vera Allen

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
August 4, 1943

Bergner Triumph

By HOWARD BARNES

IT is easy to see why Elisabeth Bergner was tempted to star in "The Two Mrs. Carrolls." The English melodrama at the Cort offers the actress a genuine field day. With its curiously dislocated construction, the Martin Vale play gives her a chance to be gay and wan, jubilantly romantic and scared out of her wits. Polite chit-chat is matched by tensely melodramatic dialogue; psychic terror has its counterpart in overt violence. Miss Bergner makes the most of every passing mood. She still does not succeed in making the piece much of a drama.

• • •

For "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" is a sprawling thriller. It packs quite a jolt in its final scenes, but it takes an unconscionable time in arriving at its climax and the motivation for an attempted murder does not even have a base of credible insanity. The show played for something like a year in London some time ago. With Miss Bergner doing her stuff, it is likely to have a considerable success on Broadway. It seems to me, though, that Edgar Wallace did the same sort of thing a great deal better.

• • •

Until the very end of the first act, you are likely to wonder why anyone ever took the trouble to mount the melodrama. An artist and his wife, living in the South of France, embrace occasionally, entertain some exceedingly dull friends and toss off odd remarks about art and beauty. Then, for no very good reason, the painter turns out to be a poisoner by avocation. Since the heroine discovers this from a former wife, the work becomes a cat and mouse shocker, with the mouse making a get-away at the ultimate moment of extermination.

• • •

The acting is something quite apart from the material. Miss Bergner weaves the spell of her artistry around the fragments of "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" so skillfully that it is always interesting and frequently as harrowing as it pretends to be. She shifts from the childish innocence of the early scenes to the terrified hysteria of the ending with brilliant modulation. She may not make the second Mrs. Carroll a very real person, but she gives the character sympathy and a depth of personality which makes one forget the obvious flaws of the playwriting.

• • •

Her supporting company is well up to the demands of the script. Victor Jory broods ferociously in the part of the would-be killer. Vera Allen is emphatically explanatory as the ex-wife who warns her successor of the artist's cute penchant for emulating the Borgias. Meanwhile Stiano Braggiotti and Philip Tonge do their best to fill in the empty spaces of the play with reasonable stage business. Reginald Denham's direction, incidentally, gives the production the breaks, when it deserves them. That isn't very often, even with Miss Bergner on hand.

NEW YORK POST
August 4, 1943

Elisabeth Bergner Appears in "The Two Mrs. Carrolls"

By WILELLA WALDORF

ELISABETH BERGNER, who has not been seen on the Broadway stage since "Escape Me Never!" eight years ago, returned last night as the harassed heroine of a melodrama called "The Two Mrs. Carrolls," at the Booth Theatre.

Miss Bergner has been searching for a vehicle in which to ride back to Broadway for several seasons and the fact that she is finally reappearing in a play that was a success in London in 1935 would seem to indicate either that the current dramatic market is not overly rich in new manuscripts, or that Miss Bergner is uncommonly fussy about the parts she plays.

"The Two Mrs. Carrolls" is a melodrama of attempted murder against a charming pre-war background (designed by Frederick Fox) in the South of France where Geoffrey Carroll, an English artist, and his second wife are occupying the Villa La Vista. It depends for its dramatic effects chiefly upon a mounting suspense that demands a good deal of facility from the actors and great skill from the stage director.

Since Reginald Denham, an old hand at this sort of polite, English drawing room horror story, directed last night's production and Miss Bergner's supporting players are for the most part excellent, "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" manages to stir up considerable well-bred excitement over the plight of the second Mrs. Carroll before her ordeal is over.

The Second Mrs. Carroll Meets the First Mrs. Carroll

As the play leans for much of its punch on the element of mystery and surprise, we shall not go into the intricacies of the plot except to say that Mr. Carroll and his second wife appear to be ideally happy until Mrs. Carroll becomes vaguely ill and is ministered to by a garrulous doctor who attributes her weakness to the change in climate. Then one day when Mr. Carroll is in Monte Carlo on business, the second Mrs. Carroll has a visit from the first Mrs. Carroll.

It so happens that this reviewer saw the play acted in London by Leslie Banks and Elena Miramova back in 1935. We do not pretend to remember all of the details of the West End production, but we do seem to recall that it was played there in three acts rather than in two, as it is now given at the Booth. At any rate, last night's version was a bit too deliberate in getting started and the three scenes which comprised the first of the two acts seemed to take a long time.

Perhaps it might help to lessen the lethargic quality of the long first act if an intermission were tossed in, making the first Mrs. Carroll's visit the climax of Act II instead of Act I. No doubt, however, Mr. Denham felt that two intermissions might interfere with the effect of tension he sought to achieve.

Unfortunately the climactic scene between the two Mrs. Carrolls came off none too well last night. Neither Miss Bergner nor Vera Allen, who played the first Mrs. Carroll, was at her best in it and Mr. Denham seemed inclined to overdo the piling up of suspense, making it all seem a bit too stagey. Miss Bergner, too, began by registering elaborate unconcern, then went into an hysterical spin that failed to move us in the least.

Miss Bergner's Performance

Except for this scene, and a sporadic tendency to overdo the melodramatic gesturing and agonized writhing, however, Miss Bergner gives an interesting and proficient performance. Since "Escape Me Never" she has discarded many of the coy mannerisms and much of the studied posturing that proved so distracting then, and especially in the early portion of "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" she is often delightful, notably in the few comic moments in the play. An actress who can be affectingly simple and natural in quieter passages, she is inclined to become overly theatrical in the "big scenes."

When Mr. Carroll suddenly appeared at the bedroom window at the end, causing several ladies in the audience to emit shrieks of alarm, Miss Bergner registered surprise and terror in a body swoop and semaphoring of the arms that reminded us suddenly that she is, after all, a Middle European. It is at moments like these that Continental stage training will out. It is a little too theatrical for a play such as "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" which is already theatrical enough and is apt to be most effective when underplayed.

Victor Jory gives an excellent performance as the artist-husband, lending a good deal of needed force to the play, with Stiano Braggiotti, Margery Maude, Philip Tonge and Michelette Burani good in other roles, and an especially effective portrayal in the seething brunette manner by a striking young woman named Irene Worth, who comes to the theatre from the movies and makes a splendid sophisticated foil for Miss Bergner's appealing personality and gamin-like charm.

"The Two Mrs. Carrolls"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
August 4, 1943

Miss Bergner and Mr. Jory Please In a Smooth Murder Melodrama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

NOTHING like a quite homicidal tendency on a hot night. Cools you off. You sit around quite pleasantly for a couple of hours waiting for Elisabeth Bergner to be knocked off and it takes your mind off raids on Hamburg and off the fact that air conditioning ain't what it used to be. "The Two Mrs. Carrolls," which appeared last night at the Booth Theatre, is a nicely mannered thriller, worth recording as the play which gets a new stage season going.

Some times it is over-mannered, for Miss Bergner is a very wiggly little actress, given to pieces of stage business that even Gertrude Lawrence never thought of. But all in all she is a believable victim of a simple but hellish little plot. It's a pleasure to report that she managed to escape last night, so she can give another performance all right.

Jory Does Well

Not that Victor Jory didn't do his best to do her in. He's an engaging cuss, tall, dark and handsome and all that, and you can hardly blame Elisabeth for marrying him and being so mad about him that she hugs him for what seems like a third of the first act. But his weakness, as whose isn't, is women, and when he finds a new one he feels he has to rub the old one out. And that's about as far as one should go in telling the plot.

As a matter of fact, Martin Vale, who wrote the play, didn't go a whole lot farther. Martin Vale is the pen name of the widow of Bayard Veiller, whose "The Thirteenth Chair" had the murder knife stuck in the ceiling.

"The Two Mrs. Carrolls" contains no knives and no cops. There is a teeny gun in it, but there is no shooting. The locale is the pre-war French Riviera, which almost all playwrights have used as a handy place for smart goings-on, much as a dramatist named Roosevelt used Shangri-La.

Characters Are Real

Here on the Riviera live an artist and his love-daffy wife, and they have the usual number of visitors—an old friend who is still in love with the wife, a doctor, a French maid, some neighbors and an earlier wife of the artist. One of the neighbors becomes the Other Woman, and there you have the setup.

I had a good time because everybody seemed calm and real. The talk is literate but not too smart, and Reginald Denham's direction makes everything seem offhand and normal. This heightens the interest when an easy murder begins to shape up. The fix Miss Bergner is in is something like the heroine's in "Angel Street," and something, also, like the predicament Joan Fontaine was in when Cary Grant told her to drink her milk in the movie, "Suspicion."

All of the company are professionals, thank goodness. Stiano Braggiotti is the old friend, Philip Tonge the doctor, Vera Allen the first Mrs. Carroll, and Irene Worth the new love. Miss Worth should be in more mystery plays. She's handsome and well dressed, but even so she looks like Charles Adams' drawings of the witch woman in The New Yorker.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 4, 1943

'Two Mrs. Carrolls' Offered at the Booth

By G. E. BLACKFORD

THEY clapped and clapped and clapped at the Booth Theatre last evening at the close of the premiere showing of "The Two Mrs. Carrolls," starring Elisabeth Bergner in her first appearance on the New York stage since her "Escape Me Never" of nearly a decade ago.

Generous applause at the final curtain on a first night is not unusual. It is a custom often indulged in to a point quite beyond the merits of an offering or that of the players' exhibition of the moment.

The prolonged applause of last night's audience was prompted neither by generosity nor courtesy. It was eminently merited, both by the play, from the pen of Martin Vale (Mrs. Edward Bayard Veiller), and by the work of Miss Bergner and the company assembled in support of the tiny star.

"The Two Mrs. Carrolls" is a smoothly written and well contrived melodrama. It has high emotional appeal, suspensefulness built with subtlety and conviction, and lighter moments to sharpen its dramatic force.

It is a good story, well told. It is excellent for Miss Bergner and she is excellent for it. At all times in complete control of her role, she rises to magnificence in the more demanding emotional periods. The part requires extreme versatility; it never finds Miss Bergner wanting.

• • •

In "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" Miss Bergner is the wife of a twice-married artist who finds it more convenient when he falls out of love to poison his spouses than to suffer the harshness of matrimonial upheaval.

Victor Jory, in chief support of Miss Bergner, is the murderous romanticist who waxes even more attentive with each lethal dose. He measures the intensity of his affection in proportion to his victim's nearness to the death his neurotic mind finds beautiful, and for him quite practical.

Irene Worth, talented newcomer from Hollywood, has the provocative role of the passionate painter's projected third Mrs. Carroll. She is his "Angel of Death," the inspiration for his masterpiece of that title. The characterization gives Miss Worth an auspicious debut on the Broadway stage. She handles her assignment with restraint and feeling.

How Miss Bergner, as the second Mrs. Carroll, becomes mysteriously ailing, how the first Mrs. Carroll (Vera Allen) comes into the scene to arouse the new victim's suspicions, and the wife's heartbrokenness as she recognizes the unwelcome yet irrefutable evidence of her husband's intent—all this provides the material of which this bit of footlight magic is wrought.

• • •

Much credit for "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" must be given to the players who aid Miss Bergner in her achievements.

Mr. Jory is admirably cast; he has featured billing and earns it. Philip Tonge is capably amusing as the doctor who failed to take the second Mrs. Carroll's symptoms as cause for alarm; Michelette Burani is properly bustling as the French maid in the Carrolls' Riviera villa; Stiano Braggiotti is a solicitous and devoted ex-suitor who comes to the rescue of Miss Bergner in the nick of time.

Vera Allen is adequate as the first Mrs. Carroll, and Margery Maude is warm and natural in the guise of a friendly neighbor, mother of the siren Miss Worth portrays.

"Try and Get It"

NEW YORK TIMES
August 3, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Try and Get It"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ON A NIGHT so hot the dogs were sticking to the asphalt, the theatre's own happy warrior came back to the Broadway battle as sponsor of the farce called "Try and Get It." There was no one on Times Square, or within the sound of its subdued roar, who did not hope the Al Woods luck would change as the season settled down for an early August opening. But as the events at the Cort ran on their way it became increasingly sad that the children again would be unruly this morning, although with regret.

The subtitle to the Sheldon Davis play is "The Key to Vivy's Room," Vivy being the latest in the Woods galaxy of Mabel, Gertie and the rest. It starts out with a rash of double meanings, grows mildly entertaining during sections in the middle and then wanders off into amateurishness for the conclusion. It probably is what happier days would have called a typical Al Woods farce, although tastes have changed since then and Broadway, it is suspected, may now want something more. It generally is not funny and its situations are old and its dialogue, direction and acting are not enough to persuade 1943 otherwise.

Mr. Davis has combined Cinderella with some of the moral attributes of "The Dough-girls"; his heroine is a wistful young person who finds herself impersonating a lady of no virtue whatever. A young man misunderstands, of course, which is good for the sake of double jokes but doesn't add much to the history of the drama. Some of Mr. Davis' dialogue sounds almost like a parody, as though the villain presently would come on to be roundly hissed, as in the old days, and the rest mainly has shied away from both wit and warmth.

Playing the leading role is Margaret Early, who is pretty but not perhaps a finished farcical actress, and Donald Murphy is the young Army lieutenant who misunderstands for a time. Hattie Noel has the part of a typical stage Negro maid and last night was getting laughs practically before entrance. Frank Merlin directed.

"Try and Get It"

NEW YORK SUN
August 3, 1943

'Try and Get It,' Sorry Little Farce, Opens Theatrical Season 1943-44

By WARD MOREHOUSE

ALBERT Herman Woods, once something of an amusement industry all in himself, set the new theatrical season in motion last evening with the submission of a pallid little farce called "Try and Get It," offered at the Cort. He has some scenery, a theater, a few players, but no play.

All of us have affection for Mr. Woods. He has done a lot for the acting profession and for the drama of this town. He was producing plays in New York before most of his present company were born. Many stars of Hollywood got their start in his casts. And it would be good news for Broadway and better news for Mr. Woods if it were now possible to report that his new play has a chance. But I fear it hasn't.

"Try and Get It" is not a doneover "Up in Mabel's Room," as has been rumored. It bears not even the faintest relationship to "Getting Gertie's Garter." It is just a threadbare and skimpy farce that Mr. Woods saw in California and thought had possibilities. And being a man of action, and never content with the noncombatant's role, here he is again trying the comeback trail, which is as tough in the theater as anywhere else.

Written by one Sheldon Davis, and staged by the amiable and experienced Frank Merlin, "Try and Get It" is of the complications that come about when the drab little Sarah Smith, a bundle of innocence, takes over the apartment and the identity of the glamorous and sophisticated Vivienne Gordon, who is off on a lark and for no good, not even her own. Playwright Davis has quite a time trying to spread his material over three acts.

Not even such experts as Charles Ruggles and Hazel Dawn, to be remembered from the Woods farce hits of yesterday, could do much with so dismaying a trifle as "Try and Get It." The performances of the company at the Cort are of the routine variety—or worse. Margaret Early, however, might prove an ingenue of promise when a part that is written comes her way.

"Try and Get It" is the first play of the theatrical season of 1943-44—and the first mistake.

'TRY AND GET IT'

"Try and Get It," farce by Sheldon Davis; directed by Frank Merlin; presented by A. H. Woods at the Cort Theatre, Monday, August 2, 1943, with the following cast:

Mignonette	Hattie Noel
Evelyn La Rue	Virginia Smith
Vivienne Gordon	Iris Hall
Thomas Barton	Albert Bergh
Sarah Smith	Margaret Early
Harry Pickens	Donald Murphy
Mickey O'Toole	Raymond Rand
Simond Beazle	Charles Knight
Grace Barton	Claire Meade

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
August 3, 1943

A. H. Woods Presents New Farce Comedy of Errors as First Play of Season

By G. E. BLACKFORD

"TRY AND GET IT," farce-comedy by Sheldon Davis, got the new season off to a lusty and loud, but somewhat limping start last night at the Cort Theatre. The offering—unmistakably reminiscent of "The Doughgirls," and "Little Red Riding Hood," in combination—was presented by A. H. Woods as the first of a number of new plays he is reported to have in store for Broadway.

• • •

The story concern two ladies of the evening, one of whose current protectors leaves on a business trip. During his absence, he asks, will she entertain his old friend from the South who is to be in town for a few days? She can hardly refuse, even though she is planing a trip to the Adirondacks with her girl friend and a couple of college football heroes.

The lady hires little Sarah Smith—a good little girl engaged to a delicatessen clerk—to impersonate her. All should have gone well had not the visiting Southerner turned out to be the soldier son of the old friend instead of the old friend. And the son—having been tipped off by his father about the basic facts in the case—is very much a wolf on the loose.

Hence, obviously, the complications. Hence, also obviously the title.

• • •

They tried very hard with "Try and Get It." In fact, that's the rub. They tried too hard.

Mr. Davis has written what in script undoubtedly is a very funny story, with many amusing situations and many laugh-provoking lines. Mr. Woods has given the play a nice production, with some very capable people in the cast.

"Try and Get It" has about everything it needs except the subtlety that any play with such a risque plot requires to become acceptable. As it appeared last night, it had all the subtlety and finesse of a blunderbuss. With a little underplaying here and there and the pruning of lines that border on the vulgar, "Try and Get It" might have been a much better thing.

• • •

There are several very good performances in the new play. Margaret Early, recruited from filmland, is properly confused as the good little girl in the den of iniquity.

Charles Knight, as a clerk come to deliver an envelope for his double-lived employer, is charmingly abashed at the circumstances in which he finds himself and Claire Meade, as the wife who shows up in the last scene to reward her competitor instead of upbraiding her, gives the play an unexpected lift. Donald Murphy, as the wolf on the loose, gives a convincing interpretation.

It's just too bad they had to say all the things they said in the way they said them. Nothing was left to the audience's imagination, and they really should have let the audience try and get it—at least a little of it—on its own.

NEW YORK POST
August 3, 1943

The New Season Opens—But Not Very Far—With "Try and Get It"

By WILELLA WALDORF

A. H. WOODS has been heralding "Try and Get It," which he produced last night at the Cort Theatre, as "a typical A. H. Woods farce."

Mr. Woods apparently underestimates the quality of his past achievements. "Try and Get It" is not a typical A. H. Woods farce. Compared to it, "Up in Mabel's Room," "Getting Gertie's Garter," "Parlor, Bedroom and Bath" and the rest of the tribe were dramatic masterpieces.

"Try and Get It" is laboriously made up of little pieces of plot so threadbare and exhausted that nobody but a desperate dramatist would have the heart to dust them off and fling them once more into the pitiless glare of the footlights.

When Little Sarah Smith, the cookie baker, walked into Vivienne Gordon's gaudy Manhattan love-nest wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, a pork-pie hat and a plain, no-nonsense-about-it coat-and-dress ensemble that might have been purchased in the children's department of the Bon Ton Shoppe in Peoria, Ill., it was evident that Sheldon Davis, author of "Try and Get It," would stop at nothing.

The cookie baker would soon remove her spectacles, Vivienne's wise-cracking friend, Evelyn La Rue, would re-do her hair and smear on mascara and lipstick. And in a series of Vivienne's modish gowns, Sarah would suddenly be transformed into a dazzling Pin-Up Girl.

Anything For a Laugh

As soon as the miraculous transformation had been accomplished, and Sarah had agreed, for a hundred dollars, to impersonate Vivienne and entertain an old fossil named Pickens for a week end, the door opened and in walked Pickens. A stalwart young Army officer, of course, right out of a movie scenario.

After that there was nothing much left to do but sit in numbed astonishment as the actors ran through all of the customary clichés and the audience shrieked with mirth.

Seldom have we encountered an audience more ready, nay eager, to laugh than the first-night gathering that greeted "Try and Get It." Not only did it respond with shouts of ecstasy to everything from the mildly comic moments to the most gruesomely hackneyed gags, but it started practicing before the curtain went up.

Whole sections giggled and guffawed in unison, apparently in happy anticipation of what was to come. There were times when we couldn't help wondering if Willie Howard might be lurking in a box making funny faces, but no. That audience came prepared to laugh. It started in early and kept at it.

Along toward the end of the third act, when the author had all but exhausted his stock of happy memories, he suddenly brought in the Widow Barton for the inevitable drunk scene. Claire Meade, who played the widow, went into it with the gusto of an actress who realizes that she has only one scene in the play and must give it her all. A dignified lady getting tipsy has always been popular with audiences and this one saluted Miss Meade with the deepest affection.

Margaret Early In Broadway Debut

Something tells us, however, that the chief reason for trying to remember "Try and Get It" as the season progresses will be the fact that in it a cute little Southern girl named Margaret Early made her Broadway debut as Sarah Smith. Miss Early hails from Alabama, sounds like it, and is an engaging piece even in the horn-rimmed spectacle phase.

Miss Early comes from the movies—she was the Southern girl in the picture "Stage Door Canteen" unless we're hopelessly confused. She knows her way about the stage well enough and is a definite addition to the Broadway list of cute tricks with Southern accents. Since she is supposed to be hopelessly ingenuous and wide-eyed through most of "Try and Get It," she becomes a trifle monotonous as the evening goes on, but that's hardly her fault. In a better comedy, she could be very fetching indeed.

As for Mr. Woods and his new venture, let us hope for his sake that he is able to gather in a whole series of audiences pining to be entertained and ready to laugh at just about anything. To discriminating theatregoers, however, we must issue a warning that "Try and Get It" is far below par as Broadway farces go.